WHEN CHRIST COMES AGAIN

GEORGE·P·ECKMAN

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CHAPTER I

APPROACH TO THE DOCTRINE

THIS is a plain book for plain people.

It was conceived in prayer and born of a desire to be helpful to the souls of men.

Many devout persons are troubled about the second coming of our Lord. They are eager to know what they ought to believe, rather than to be told what they ought not to believe.

The author of this little book has spent many years in the pastorate, and has been near to the people. He has written what he believes they need, and he asks God to bless his message to their spiritual profit.

He has no selfish purpose to serve. He does not care for reputation. His only concern is truth. He writes from a deep conviction. He feels himself goaded to his task by the Holy Spirit.

One of the greatest thinkers among men admitted that "he regarded as his best friend the man who robbed him of his dearest error and put despised truth in its place." The surest way to bestow this favor is to set the truth openly before the face of error. Jesus

said, "Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."[1] This is a principle which applies not only to the truth which saves from sin, but also to the truth which liberates the mind from falsehood.

Therefore this little book is built upon the Scriptures, and not upon the imagination of man. It also takes into account the facts of human experience, which never contradict the Scriptures, if both are accurately understood. "For we did not follow cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."[2]

Men may be very brilliant, and at the same time very misleading. Every writer on religious themes should regard the warning of Saint Paul: "Take heed lest there shall be any one that maketh spoil of you through his philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ."[3]

Right Use of the Bible

The Bible must be used frankly, nothing being taken away from it which belongs to it, and nothing added to it which does not belong

[1] John 8. 32.
[2] 2 Peter 1. 16.
[3] Colossians 2. 8.

to it. Teachers of the Scriptures must be able to say with Saint Paul: "We have renounced the hidden things of shame, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully."[4]

The Bible is the most abused book in the world. It receives its worst treatment from certain persons who call themselves its friends. It has nothing to fear from its open enemies. "For

All flesh is as grass,
And all the glory thereof as the flower of grass.
The grass withereth, and the flower falleth:
But the word of the Lord abideth forever.
And this is the word of good tidings which was preached unto you."[5] "The word of God is not bound"[6] by those who willfully seek to hem it in. The infidel cannot harm the Bible. No science can upset it. The vain philosophy of men cannot disturb it. "For seeing that in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom knew not God, it was God's good pleasure through the foolishness of the preaching to save them that believe. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men."[7]

But the influence of the Bible can be injured

[4] 2 Corinthians 4. 2.
[5] 1 Peter 1. 24, 25.
[6] 2 Timothy 2. 9.
[7] 1 Corinthians 1. 21, 25.

by those of its alleged friends who either purposely or unwittingly pervert its teachings. There are in it "some things hard to be understood, which the ignorant and unstedfast wrest, *as they do* also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction."[8] But the learned also fall into this grievous wrongdoing, forgetting "that no prophecy of scripture is of private interpretation. For no prophecy ever came by the will of man: but men spake from God, being moved by the Holy Spirit."[9] Human wisdom is not capable of making additions to inspired Scripture which are not guaranteed by express and unquestionable revelations of the Spirit; and what one might fancy to be an inspiration from God is to be tested by his known and certified disclosures. "Which things also we speak," says Paul, "not in words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Spirit teacheth; combining spiritual things with spiritual *words*."[10] Even the great apostle candidly said when he was discussing certain subjects, "I have no commandment of the Lord."[11] Surely, teachers in our day should be equally scrupulous and guarded.

The advice given long ago through Jeremiah is still good: "The prophet that hath a dream,

[8] 2 Peter 3. 16.
[9] 2 Peter 1. 20, 21.
[10] 1 Corinthians 2. 13.
[11] 1 Corinthians 7. 25.

let him tell a dream; and he that hath my word, let him speak my word faithfully."[12] It is a sad and mischievous thing that even good people in our day will mix up their dreams with the word of the Lord. When a man puts his theory, even if he thinks it is from God, on the same high plane with the words of Scripture, he is guilty of a serious impropriety, to say the least. His act may do great harm to simple-hearted people. Everyone who ventures to teach divine things should pray earnestly that he may be able to present himself "approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, handling aright the word of truth."[13]

Many theorists write into the word of God what is not there. We cannot say that in all cases they do this knowingly or willfully, but the result is just the same. Every passage of Scripture should be examined in the most prayerful spirit, and by the aid of the best and most devout scholarship that can be obtained. With even painful self-denial, he who writes about a Scripture text should make sure that he has not put into it the least thing it does not actually say.

But even this care is not enough. He must

[12] Jeremiah 23. 28.
[13] 2 Timothy 2. 15.

now compare the text with every other scripture which bears on the same truth. In doing this he must be certain that the passages he uses for comparison are really written on the same subject. He must not be deceived by a similarity of words. This is the peril of all who go dredging through the Bible for proof texts, and are not careful to see that the texts selected are what they seem to be on the surface. Great harm has been done to religion by forgetting this caution. If every student of the Bible would ask, "Who wrote this sentence? When did he write it? To whom did he write it?" a great amount of danger would be avoided. The Holy Spirit has spoken through a great variety of persons and under a great diversity of conditions, and for many different people. All these things, if they are remembered, and if they are given their true value, will keep us from seriously misunderstanding the Bible.

Christ Himself the Test of Doctrine

We should fill our minds with the word of the Lord. Many of the things taught to-day about the second coming of Christ have no standing in the Scriptures. Yet those who proffer these stones in the place of bread strive to make their followers believe that the texts

they quote are divinely inspired proofs of their wrong opinions. Careful Bible students are not cheated in this way, but the unwary are often thus deceived. Reader, let no man dazzle you by an array of texts into accepting his theories, on the supposition that he must be right because he names chapter and verse for his doctrine. Sift his texts for yourself. Do not take his word for their meaning. Study them in their connections. See what goes before and follows them. If you do not feel able alone to get at the exact truth, go to some Christian minister who has spent many years in patient and scholarly searching of the Scriptures and obtain his help.

Here is a test, however, which the humblest Christian can apply for himself: bring everything to the touch of the mind of Christ. He said, "Ye search the scriptures, because ye think that in them ye have eternal life; and these are they which bear witness of me."[14] He is the real key to all prophecy and all doctrine. Every piece of writing in the Bible must be judged by the light of his character and teaching. The Spirit of Christ we may have in our own hearts, and "if any man hath not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his."[15]

[14] John 5. 39.
[15] Romans 8. 9.

It is by obeying God that we enter into the Christ life. "If any man willeth to do his will, he shall know of the teaching."[16]

Now, when a theory is brought to us with a great show of authority, let us ask whether it is a teaching which corresponds with the spirit of the Christ who speaks in the Gospels, and whom we know because we have him in our hearts. Perhaps some one will quote from Paul, or Peter, or James, or some other writer, giving an interpretation of the text which fits his own theory. Let us then ask ourselves whether this representation of what these inspired men wrote is in accord with what we know Christ said, and with what we know he is. If any man puts forward a teaching which is hostile to our Lord's recorded way of speaking on the same subject, we may be sure it is wrong. If prophecy is made to mean something contrary to the spirit of Christ as you know him by a living experience of his life, then you may be certain either that it has been misinterpreted or that it does not refer to Christ at all. Believing this to be the only safe way in which to study the Scriptures, emphasis is laid in this book, first upon Christ's own words, then upon the words of his apostles. Out of these it is possible to reach the

[16] John 7. 17.

meaning of prophecy. To begin the other way around, starting with ancient prophecies which are very obscure, moving on to apostolic writings, and finally using both to fix a doctrine before we have learned precisely what Christ taught, is to follow an uncertain lead, to say the least.

Things Which Are Hidden

If we find difficulties which we cannot explain (and the greatest minds have been compelled to admit that some things in the Bible are too deep and mysterious for them to fathom), we need not lose our confidence. It is not necessary for us to work out all the puzzles of the Scriptures. This is one of the temptations which beset earnest Bible students. They are led away by the fascination of a difficult passage. They become more interested in it than in some spiritual truth. This is the defect of some who are carried away by the strange figures in the Bible, so that they have no time or energy for real Christian service. They worry and weary themselves over the beasts in Daniel's visions or in the book of Revelation, while they neglect to do Christian work that would overcome the beasts of iniquity in our day. We do not need to explain every dark saying in the Scriptures,

but we do need to show forth Him who is the light of the world. We should not blink the difficulties in the Bible. We should frankly admit them. But we need not feel compelled to invent a theory to fit them.

Moses truly said, "The secret things belong unto Jehovah our God; but the things that are revealed belong unto us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law."[17] It is quite enough for us to act upon what is plainly revealed. There is no profit in stretching our minds upon the rack of questioning about things hidden from us by God's wisdom. Jesus uttered a caution which contains a widely applicable principle when he said to his disciples, "It is not for you to know times or seasons, which the Father hath set within his own authority."[18]

The only honest way with the Bible is to examine all scripture first, and build the doctrine upon a careful study. Many persons begin the other way. They concoct a doctrine, and then go through the Scriptures to find texts which will support it. The Bible is so wonderful that you can prove anything in it if you omit what you do not want for your purpose and take what you do want. That

[17] Deuteronomy 29. 29.
[18] Acts 1. 7.

is a method pursued by some who write and speak upon the question of the second coming of our Lord. Not only is this improper and misleading, but it has driven many thoughtful persons away from a truth which is of great value. No true Christian can be anything but glad over the prospect that Christ will return. But he may be led to feel that the promise of his coming is doubtful if it is hedged about with unscriptural and unreasonable theories of the time, the manner, and the purpose of his return.

False Prophets

Jesus warned his disciples against false prophets, and especially those who should arise in connection with the expectation of his return.[19] The apostles were equally anxious that Christians should not be led astray by evil teachers. Referring to the past and looking for a repetition of history, Peter said, "There arose false prophets also among the people, as among you also there shall be false teachers, who shall privily bring in destructive heresies."[20] John is just as anxious, for he says, "Many false prophets are gone out into the world."[21]

[19] Matthew 24. 5, 11, 24; Mark 13. 6, 22; Luke 21. 8.
[20] 2 Peter 2. 1.
[21] 1 John 4. 1.

We must remember that there are several kinds of false prophets. Some of these are intentional frauds. Of these Jesus said, "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravening wolves."[22] These are to be tested by their works, not by their appearance.

But many false prophets are not willful impostors. They are deeply religious, but they have unwittingly allowed themselves to be made victims of spiritual pride. They have become wise in their own conceits,[23] a peril against which Paul frequently warned his readers. They are swollen with egotism, which betrays them into the folly of substituting their own fancies for the explicit word of the Lord.[24] They do not mean to be false prophets, but they run ahead of the Lord's revelation or commandment, and thus become deceivers.

Coleridge said, "He who begins by loving Christianity better than the truth will proceed by loving his own sect or church better than Christianity, and will end in loving himself better than all." People who think Christianity means a theory they have invented are often guilty of this self-love, though they may not know it.

Then there are other false prophets who

[22] Matthew 7. 15. [23] Romans 12. 16. [24] Galatians 6. 3.

have become such by permitting themselves to put more emphasis upon certain minor aspects of truth than upon the truth itself. They are eccentrics. They bulge too much on one side. They force a subordinate thing into undue prominence. This fault is found among some conscientious persons who are earnestly proclaiming the second coming of our Lord. They make more of the time, the manner, and the circumstances of his coming than of the sublime truth involved in his return, and the inspiring reasons for his final advent, as revealed in the Scriptures. Hence they give their imagination loose rein, or they press unwarranted interpretations of Scripture prophecy. They hold attention to dramatic accompaniments rather than to plain facts and their necessary results.

The consequences to the victim of false or misleading teachings are just the same, whether the prophet is sincere and conscientious, or purposely deceitful. In any case our Lord's words are applicable: "Whosoever shall cause one of these little ones that believe on me to stumble, it were better for him if a great millstone were hanged about his neck, and he were cast into the sea."[25] By adhering closely to what is certainly known in the word of

[25] Mark 9. 42; see also Luke 17. 2.

God, after careful comparison of all scripture, and the total rejection of all purely human admixtures, we shall avoid the terrible fate of those who prophesy wrong things.

Troublesome Talk

Teachers of religion, however sincere, should pray to be delivered from the spirit of unprofitable discussion, "that they strive not about words, to no profit, to the subverting of them that hear."[26] It is not helpful to right thinking that we should enter into noisy battle with erroneous thinkers. The obligation to rebuke false teachers is constant. But, as Paul says, "The end of the charge is love out of a pure heart and a good conscience and faith unfeigned: from which things some having swerved have turned aside unto vain talking; desiring to be teachers of the law, though they understand neither what they say, nor whereof they confidently affirm."[27] Error fails in the presence of simple truth. We need not smite false teachers with the arm of flesh. "The sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God,"[28] is quite sufficient. Facts of human experience, which can never contradict the

[26] 2 Timothy 2. 14.
[27] 1 Timothy 1. 5–7.
[28] Ephesians 6. 17.

word of God, are also a defense against error. Let things be stated as they are, and not as theorists may fancy them to be, and truth will prevail.

We are now to take a square look at the doctrine of Christ's second coming. The writer has no theory to construct. He has no plan of the ages to prove. He has no program for Christ to choose. He comes to his task, as he firmly believes, without a prejudice except his fondness for truth. He has determined to go as far as the Bible goes, but no farther. He will follow where the Scriptures lead without hesitation or reluctance. But when the Scriptures give no leading he will not venture to speculate. Revelation is enough. Speculation is more than enough, which means that it is useless and unhelpful. If God had wanted to give us more knowledge about certain mysteries, he could easily have inspired men to write additional revelations. There are many things about which we desire knowledge. Among them are queries which God has not seen fit to answer. When men tell us they have additional revelations from God, we should be very chary about accepting them. Saint Paul's prediction has often been verified: "The time will come when they will not endure the sound doctrine; but, having

itching ears, will heap to themselves teachers after their own lusts; and will turn away their ears from the truth, and turn aside unto fables."[29] "Ye therefore, beloved, knowing *these things* beforehand, beware lest, being carried away with the error of the wicked, ye fall from your own stedfastness. But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him *be* the glory both now and forever. Amen."[30]

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[29] 2 Timothy 4. 3, 4.
[30] 2 Peter 3. 17, 18.

CHAPTER II

TRUE PLACE OF THE THEME

At the close of his life John Selden, one of the most learned men in England during the seventeenth century, said to Archbishop Usher, "I have surveyed most of the learning that is among the sons of men, but I cannot recollect any passage out of all my books and papers whereon I can rest my soul, save this from the sacred Scriptures: 'For the grace of God hath appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us, to the intent that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly and righteously and godly in this present world; looking for the blessed hope and appearing of the glory of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a people for his own possession, zealous of good works.' "[1]

There is a sweeping splendor in this passage which justifies the devout scholar's confidence. It begins by tracing the source of salvation—"the grace of God"; it continues by affirming the universality of this grace—"bringing sal-

[1] Titus 2. 11–14.

vation to all men"; it declares the duty of man in view of this revelation—to "live soberly and righteously and godly"; it keeps the mind on the practical bearings of religion—"in this present world"; it directs the soul to the high incentives of a godly life—"looking for the blessed hope and appearing of the glory of the great God and our Saviour"; and it presents the object of Christ's atonement—"that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a people for his own possession, zealous of good works." If we keep these words in mind we shall the more easily put a true valuation on the doctrine of our Lord's return, which fills so prominent a place in this noble passage.

Every time a Christian recites the Apostles' Creed he affirms his belief that the Lord is coming again "to judge the quick and the dead." Every time he partakes of the Lord's Supper he should recall the words of Paul: "For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink the cup, ye proclaim the Lord's death till he come."[2] At all times he should remember that Christ, "having been once offered to bear the sins of many, shall appear a second time, apart from sin, to them that wait for him, unto salvation."[3]

[2] 1 Corinthians 11. 26.

[3] Hebrews 9. 28.

In the service for the burial of the dead, as recited by Christian ministers of various sects, it is declared in language hallowed by centuries of use that the body is committed to the earth, "looking for the general resurrection in the last day, and the life of the world to come, through our Lord Jesus Christ; at whose second coming in glorious majesty to judge the world, the earth and the sea shall give up their dead," etc.[4]

In many confessions of faith adopted by Christian bodies there is agreement with the doctrine set forth in the Articles of Religion of the Methodist Episcopal Church in the following words: "Christ did truly rise again from the dead, and took again his body, with all things appertaining to the perfection of man's nature, wherewith he ascended into heaven, and there sitteth until he return to judge all men at the last day."[5]

An Ancient Belief

These quotations represent the conviction of the Christian Church from the earliest centuries, though it has been held with varying degrees of certainty and with a diversity of

[4] Methodist Episcopal Discipline, Protestant Episcopal Prayer Book, and many liturgies.

[5] Article III.

opinions concerning the time, the circumstances, and the results of Christ's second advent. It had a place of prominence in the thought of the earliest Christians. The writers of the four Gospels gave large space to it in the teachings of Jesus. The apostles made it conspicuous in their preaching, as we learn from the Acts of the Apostles, and more especially from the epistles which grew out of their work in establishing churches. In his earliest letters Paul dwells fondly upon it, and leaves traces of it in nearly all of his writings. It is given significant reference in the Epistles of Peter, James and John. It is mentioned in the Epistle to the Hebrews, and shines through the book of Revelation.

It is evident that the apostles of Christ and the converts whom they first made were confident that their Master would speedily return to the earth, and most of them supposed he would come back during their lifetime. This conviction doubtless had much influence with the church immediately after Pentecost, and probably explains in part the willingness of the Christian community to set aside individual ownership of property for the common good.[6] They parted with their possessions under the impression that they would soon

[6] Acts 2. 44, 45; 4. 32–35.

have no need for them, since the Lord was quickly coming back to judge the world and begin his visible reign among men. They thought the words of Jesus concerning his coming again could bear no other meaning, as was natural enough.

In the centuries immediately following the apostolic period Christian teachers were deeply moved by the same considerations. Gradually it became evident that the expectation of an early return of our Lord was not to be fulfilled. Hence it was thought necessary to alter the construction put upon Christ's words. The discussions of theologians as the centuries moved on, accompanied as they were by very novel and unconvincing theories about the second coming of Christ, produced in the Christian world a spirit of weariness respecting the doctrine, and finally it became the general opinion that the teaching was so obscure that, while the promise of Christ's return must be regarded as genuine, the date of his coming was so indefinite that the whole question might be set aside as one of the insoluble mysteries of religion.

Modern Opinions

Revivals of interest in this subject have occurred at intervals, but unscriptural and

unreasonable theories pertaining largely to the date and circumstances of the second advent, reached through mechanical interpretations of prophecy, have interfered with its acceptance by thousands of Christians. In more recent times there has been a decided reawakening on the subject, accompanied by a new examination of the Scriptures, and also, it must be confessed, by the invention of crude theories relating to the order of events which may be presumed to take place at the second coming of Christ, and to the probability that this advent to judgment is near at hand. A considerable interest has thus been provoked, though the Christian world is far from agreement on the matter. We may distinguish broadly the following classes of thinkers on this question:

First, those who claim that the whole subject is of comparatively no importance. Their number is, unfortunately, very large. They vaunt themselves as exceedingly practical people. They ask, as was predicted of their sort, "Where is the promise of his coming? for, from the day that the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation."[7] If they do not reject the doctrine out of hand, they at least question its

[7] 2 Peter 3. 4.

value. They say there is no need to bother one's soul over a thing which is a mere matter of speculation, and on which there is no agreement among scholars and theologians. Furthermore, if Christians were united in their opinion of it, the doctrine has no strong bearing, they say, on the making of character. There are many other essential doctrines about which the church is sure, and these are both necessary to salvation and helpful to spiritual development. Let us center our thought upon these teachings and put aside the discussion of Christ's return as a thing of utterly subordinate interest. To this criticism we shall give large attention later, but we may pause here to insert the fact that in the thought of Paul and other apostles there is much worth in keeping before one's mind the second coming of our Lord, as a means of shaping behavior to good ends. This passage, among several which might be quoted, is an instance in point: "When Christ, *who is* our life, shall be manifested, then shall ye also with him be manifested in glory. Put to death therefore your members which are upon the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry."[8]

[8] Colossians 3. 4, 5.

The Topmost Truth

The opposite extreme is represented by those who make the second coming of Christ almost, if not quite, the entire gospel. They find it taught everywhere from Genesis to Revelation; in the poetry, prophecy, history, and even the statistics of the Bible. They see it in almost every speech of our Lord recorded in the Gospels, in almost every utterance of the apostles. They find it foreshadowed or intimated in passages where the average student of the Bible would never expect it. Christendom has long been familiar with this style of biblical interpretation. There was a time in this country when controversy on the mode of baptism was foremost in the thought of Christians. Then advocates of various positions found proof texts for their favorite theory in every part of the Scriptures. There was also a time when a narrow doctrine of sanctification was heralded by noisy enthusiasts, who found substance for their pet convictions in every part of the Bible regardless of the connection or purport of the passage. Such gross abuses of Scripture have not entirely disappeared. The method is now being used to substantiate theories concerning the second coming of Christ. The Bible is regarded as a great bin full of texts, all of equal authority

and appropriateness, if they can be made to set up or strengthen a position already taken. It is as if the pieces of a picture puzzle had been thrown into a heap, from which it was the task of the skillful solver of difficulties to draw out those which could be combined to fit the pattern. The Bible is searched from one end to the other with a view to selecting those sentences from writers covering a period of at least fifteen hundred years which, when matched together by the hand of a cunning artificer, will produce a representation of a theory which he has already conceived. This is a dishonest way of treating the Scriptures. But, unfortunately, theology has been cursed by this bane almost from the beginning of the Christian Church.

Those who make the second coming of Christ unqualifiedly the most important of all doctrines go so far as to say it is the central and pivotal teaching of religion. A minister in New York declares that during a long pastorate he has scarcely preached a sermon or made an exegesis which has not either proceeded from or led to the doctrine of the second coming of Christ. He and others of his ilk claim that the Bible cannot be understood without following such a process. This is the key which unlocks all the mysteries of the most

obscure passages in the Bible. The extremists who set up the claim that the second coming of Christ is the supreme doctrine of our religion, to which all others are subordinate, make even the atonement of Christ of minor significance. Not satisfied with such extravagance, they proceed to construct a mechanical and fantastic scheme of operations for Christ and his saints. On the strength of widely separated texts of Scripture, torn out of their immediate connection, they build up such a program for our Lord as could not be constructed on any sane and candid method of interpreting the Scriptures, and which has no support in the words of Christ and no justification in the reason of the case.

An Undue Stress

It is such unwarranted extremes which have driven many devout people away from the study of a subject which deserves earnest attention. It is difficult to understand how any judicious person could regard the second coming of Christ as the one exclusive doctrine of supreme importance. The most elementary knowledge of theology and the Bible ought to enable anyone to see that the incarnation, for example, is a doctrine of supreme significance, without which there could be no such thing as

Christianity. Jesus came into the world for the purpose of manifesting God in the flesh, and thus bringing to man a revelation surpassing anything the human mind had dared to conjecture. The sacrifice of Christ, without which there is no remission of sins and on which the salvation of the world depends, commonly called in theology the atonement, attended as it is by the profoundest mysteries, is certainly a doctrine of supreme importance. The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, with its manifold implications respecting the future life, is certainly a doctrine of supreme importance, and was so regarded by the apostle Paul, whose words concerning the second coming of Christ are so thoroughly relied upon by the advocates of strange theories of our Lord's return. If Paul believed, as he said, that without the resurrection of Jesus Christ the faith of Christians would be vain, their preaching mere imposture, and themselves the most miserable of all men,[9] we must consider that the resurrection of Christ is a supreme doctrine. The work of the Holy Spirit is surely a doctrine of the first importance, without which we have no solid ground for our belief in the inspiration of the Scriptures or the work of Christ in the human heart,

[9] 1 Corinthians 15. 17–19.

or the gift of divine power in the operations of the church. Thus one might go on specifying doctrines without which the fabric of Christian theology would fall into hopeless confusion. To say that the return of Christ is to be placed on a par with some of these teachings is doubtless justified. It is the sequel of all previous revelations of Christ to the world. But to say that the return of Christ is the one supreme doctrine is like claiming that the only thing worth considering in a pyramid is its apex, that the foundations and the interior construction are of very slight importance as compared with the pinnacle which adorns the top.

People who put forward in demonstration of this doctrine the alleged fact that a majority of the most successful evangelists of our time make it central to their teaching, assert that which is of very little value, since it may be said with equal truth that there is no successful evangelist among us who does not believe in the incarnation, the atonement of Christ, the resurrection from the dead, the work of the Holy Spirit, and other great fundamental teachings. Upon which one of these doctrines shall we pitch for the reason of a particular evangelist's success? If he should drop out any of them, could he win? The

claim proves too much for the advocates of the surpassing value of the return of Christ as substance for preaching.

On the other hand, to deny any importance to the second advent is equally wrong and harmful, since (1) the doctrine would not have such space given to it in the teachings of Jesus and in the writings of his apostles if it had not a vital relation to the Christian gospel; (2) it is decidedly important as the culmination of Christ's work for the redemption of the world, without which his mediatorial ministry on earth would seem to be incomplete; and (3) it is the final verification before all worlds of Christ's sublime claim. Upon his return to the earth and the establishment of his reign among men no excuse will be left for not accepting him and his teachings.

The Sayings of Jesus

We shall get a clear idea of the relative importance of this doctrine if we notice the attention given to it in the New Testament. There are four Gospels which tell us what Christ said and did. The first three are called the synoptics, because they give practically one comprehensive and harmonious view of Christ's earthly ministry. They relate events as a narrative and do not deal with doctrines.

They state facts and report discourses, but they do not, like the fourth Gospel, spring from a purpose to persuade men to accept Christ as the Saviour. John says in explanation of his choice of materials: "These are written, that ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye may have life in his name."[10]

Taking up the record, first of the synoptics, we find the following instances of Christ's proclamation that he will come again to the earth: When commissioning his twelve apostles to go forth "to the lost sheep of the house of Israel," healing the sick and preaching the kingdom, he said: "Ye shall not have gone through the cities of Israel, till the Son of man be come."[11]

When Jesus and his disciples were at Cæsarea Philippi, he said to them: "The Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then shall he render unto every man according to his deeds. Verily I say unto you, There are some of them that stand here, who shall in no wise taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom."[12]

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[10] John 20. 31.

[11] Matthew 10. 23.

[12] Matthew 16. 27; Luke 9. 27; see also Mark 9. 1.

It is in this connection also that Jesus says, "Whosoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of man also shall be ashamed of him, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."[13]

When Jesus declares his Messiahship before the high priest at the time of his trial, his claims being called in question, he says, "Henceforth ye shall see the Son of man sitting at the right hand of Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven."[14]

In the parable of the tares[15] we also have a clear declaration that Jesus is coming again accompanied with his angels, to gather out of his kingdom whatever is offensive, and to award glory to the righteous, who are to "shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father."

The judgment scene recorded in Matthew's Gospel[16] is introduced by this statement: "When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the angels with him, then shall he sit on the throne of his glory: and before him shall be gathered all nations."

On a certain occasion the Pharisees asked

[13] Mark 8. 38; see also Luke 9. 26.
[14] Matthew 26. 64; see also Mark 14. 62.
[15] Matthew 13. 36–43.
[16] Matthew 25. 31-46.

Jesus when the kingdom of God should come, and he replied: "The kingdom of God cometh not with observation: neither shall they say, Lo, here! or, There! for lo, the kingdom of God is within you." Then turning to his disciples, he warned them not to be deceived by false leaders, but to remember that his coming would be as unmistakable as the lightning which flashes across the sky, and that men would be as preoccupied with the affairs of common life when he should return as they were in the days of Noah before the flood, and in the days of Lot before the destruction of Sodom.[17]

At the close of our Lord's parable of the unjust judge he declares that God will "avenge his elect, that cry to him day and night," and then exclaims: "Nevertheless, when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?"[18]

These are Christ's general proclamations and intimations of his second coming; to which must be added certain parables and other illustrations, some of which were evidently intended to emphasize the fact of his return, while others seem to have been spoken with that event in our Lord's mind, though they do not

[17] Luke 17. 20–37.
[18] Luke 18. 7, 8.

specifically refer to it. Attention should be given to the parables of the virgins;[19] the talents, which is given in two forms;[20] the fig tree;[21] also to the similes of the servants who are to have their loins girded and their lamps burning,[22] the householder and the thief,[23] the faithful and unfaithful servants,[24] and the careless reveler.[25]

It will be noticed by those who read these passages that most of them are found in connection with our Lord's apocalyptic address, at the close of his public ministry, as recorded in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke.[26]

We shall have occasion later to refer in detail to this address, in treating of the time, manner, and purpose of Christ's return. We now pause only to point out how large a space it fills in the recorded sayings of our Lord.

What John Has to Say

Having shown what Christ said about his return, as recorded in the first three Gospels,

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[19] Matthew 25. 1–12.
[20] Matthew 25. 13–20; Luke 19. 11–28.
[21] Matthew 24. 32, 33.
[22] Luke 12. 35–48.
[23] Matthew 25. 42–44.
[24] Matthew 25. 45–51.
[25] Luke 21. 34–36.
[26] Matthew 24; Mark 13; Luke 21.

we may now turn to the fourth Gospel; for we do not obtain all that he taught from the synoptics. Fortunately, the Holy Spirit has given to us John's wonderful Gospel, for it throws a flood of light on our Lord's teachings concerning his second advent among men. Certain things which are dark to us in the narratives of Matthew, Mark, and Luke are illuminated by the records of that disciple whom Jesus loved,[27] and who stood closer to him than any of the other writers.

It is well for us to remember that the Gospel of John, and probably also the First Epistle of John, are the latest writings we have in the New Testament. This fact is easily overlooked because we get the impression that the arrangement of the books is chronological. This is wrong, however, because the Epistles of Paul are among the earliest contributions to the New Testament. The Epistles to the Thessalonians, which are the books in which he expresses himself most abundantly about the second advent, are the first books in point of time which are found in the New Testament, and they doubtless reflect what the early disciples thought with regard to the second coming of Christ. The memorials contained in the Gospels of Matthew and Mark were collected

[27] John 13. 23; 19. 26; 20. 2; 21. 7, 20.

about the same time that Paul was writing his first Epistles.

But when we take up the Gospel of John we are reading a book which was not written until after Paul had left the world, and not until the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke had been published. This Gospel is, in fact, the very latest, and is farthest removed from the theories of Christ's speedy return which had been entertained by Christ's disciples, and even by John himself, as we know by reference to John 21. 22. He had probably at one time expected our Lord's return during his lifetime. Perhaps he still held that expectation while he was writing the fourth Gospel. Nevertheless, he was now an old man, and Christ had not yet returned. Without doubt this modified his view of the subject. He does not doubt that his Lord will return, but being a man of deep reflection, he has seen in the preaching of his Master a deeper spiritual meaning than others have noted, and all through his Gospel, while he has taken up questions of the resurrection and the final judgment without hesitation, he has imparted to them a spiritual significance which he acquired from his close fellowship with Christ, and which is not so clearly intimated in the records of other Gospels.

This does not mean that he has not preserved

definite predictions of Christ's visible return. It is he who has given to us our Lord's wonderful farewell discourse, delivered the night before his crucifixion, in which are contained these words: "I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I come again, and will receive you unto myself; that where I am, *there* ye may be also."[28] A little farther along in the same address Christ says, "Ye heard how I said to you, I go away, and I come unto you."[29] It is believed also that it is our Lord's return to which he referred when he said to Nathanael, "Ye shall see the heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man."[30] There is a plainer statement of what Christ had taught in his rebuke to Peter's question about John, "What shall this man do?" Our Lord replied, "If I will that he tarry till I come, what *is that* to thee? follow thou me."[31]

There are various other passages in the Gospel of John relating to resurrection and judgment, but which of necessity include the teaching of Christ concerning his second coming. These will be considered in their proper place, when other aspects of the subject are treated. They are mentioned here in order

[28] John 14. 2, 3.
[29] John 14. 28.
[30] John 1. 51.
[31] John 21. 22.

that the reader may know they have not been overlooked.[32]

Paul and the Other Apostles

We have already mentioned the prominent place which the second coming of Christ occupies in the writings of Paul and other apostles; but we call attention to it again, because hasty readers of the New Testament are not likely to realize either the quality or the import of the matter on this subject to be found in these great productions. The theme has no reference in the Epistle to the Galatians, or the letter to Philemon, and but casual mention in the Epistles to the Ephesians and Colossians.[33] It is not prominent in the Epistle to the Romans.[34] But it is the most important element in the Epistles to the Thessalonians, it is conspicuous in the Epistles to the Corinthians, it appears often in the Epistle to the Philippians and in the letters to Timothy and Titus.[35]

In the Epistle to the Hebrews, and the

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[32] John 5. 25–29; Joh n 11. 25, 26.

[33] Ephesians 4. 30; Colossians 3. 4.

[34] Romans 2. 5, 16.

[35] 1 Corinthians 1. 4–8; 11. 26; 15. 23; 16. 22. 2 Corinthians 1. 14. Philippians 1. 6 10; 2. 16; 3. 11; 3. 20, 21; 4. 5. 1 Thessalonians 1. 10; 2. 19; 3. 13; 4. 13 18; 5. 1 10; 5. 23. 2 Thessalonians 1. 7 10; 2. 1 8. 1 Timothy 6. 13–15; 2 Timothy 4. 1; 4. 8. Titus 2. 11–15.

Epistles of James, Peter, and John, there is much direct statement or incidental allusion bearing on the subject.[36] The Epistle of Jude contains a single passage concerning final judgment which is a citation from the Book of Enoch.[37] The Apocalypse of John is replete with the theme.[38]

It would seem to be impossible for any student of the Bible merely to have brought to his attention the extent to which this subject pervaded the minds of Christ's apostles without being convinced of the great significance of a doctrine on which the Holy Spirit inspired these writers to express themselves so freely and fully. Surely, it is a very shallow judgment which holds that the second coming of Christ is so much a matter of speculation, that it can safely be put in the list of doctrines which make their appeal only to people who are fond of controversy.

The Right Proportion

Roughly speaking, we may divide opinion on this subject into three attitudes represented by:

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[36] Hebrews 9. 24–28; 10. 22–24; 10. 25; 10. 35–37. James 5. 7, 8; 1 Peter 1. 7, 13; 4. 13; 5. 1–4. 2 Peter 3. 1 John 2. 28; 3. 2, 3. 2 John 7.

[37] Jude 14, 15.

[38] Revelation 1. 7; 2. 25; 3. 3, 10, 11; 14. 14–16; 16. 15; 22. 20.

1. Those who think it is nothing.
2. Those who think it is everything.
3. Those who think it is something.

In the last named class there is much room for subdivision, according to the degrees of importance assigned to the doctrine by various persons who hold it.

Rejecting the idea that this doctrine is the supremely important teaching of Christianity, what rank should we give to it? An examination of Paul's writings will help us to a sound decision. We have seen how much space he uses on this subject. He, therefore, regarded it as highly essential to a complete understanding of the gospel. But that he did not think of it as the supreme doctrine is clear, if we scan his epistles in the order in which they were composed.

In his First Epistle to the Thessalonians the second advent is the principal matter, and this is true of the Second Epistle to the Thessalonians, which was evidently written to correct some misunderstandings which had arisen with regard to his first Epistle.[39] When we come to the Epistles to the Corinthians, which were next in point of time among the writings of Paul, we find the subject still strong in the thought of the apostle, but not nearly so prom-

[39] 2 Thessalonians 2. 1.

inent as it was when he wrote to the Thessalonians. As we go on to the Epistle to the Romans, and then to the Epistle to the Philippians, which follow in chronological order, and then to the later Epistles, we observe a steady decline in the amount of attention he bestowed upon this subject. What is the reason for this?

1. It is plain that when Paul wrote his first Epistles his thought on the second coming had reached its highest point. He never afterward wrote anything which shows an enlarged view on the subject. There was nothing additional for him to say.

2. This does not necessarily imply that Paul changed his mind with regard to the significance of the doctrine, as some people have supposed. There is nothing in his later writings to suggest this, and it is altogether improbable.

3. The earliest Epistles, in which the second coming has the greatest prominence, were written to recent converts; the others to churches which had been established for some time. It was important that beginners in the Christian life should be taught this doctrine with emphasis; the older churches had, of course, already received it. Hence it was only necessary, when writing to them, that the sub-

ject should be mentioned without detailed exposition. Other teaching upon the application of the great gospel to the life of individuals would be required. This would naturally leave small space for a subject which by this time had come to be fairly well understood.

Our conclusion from all this must be that, while Paul regarded the second coming of Christ as a doctrine of large significance, he did not give it a place among the greatest of fundamental teachings of the gospel. In his profound and systematic exposition of Christian truth in the Epistle to the Romans he gives it no very conspicuous position. It is not a part of his central argument. He evidently esteemed it as among the rudiments of Christian theology, great in itself, but not great enough to dominate religious thought; it belonged, rather, to the second division of Christian belief.

Paul's evident rating of the doctrine we may accept without hesitation. It is quite impossible for the truth of Christ's second coming to fill the space in our thought which it held in the minds of the first Christians. They were expecting him to return within their lifetime. It is not certain that Paul shared this belief, but is unquestionable that he looked for Christ's return in a very short time. This

would make him feel the urgency of proclaiming the near approach of the second advent, and of explaining the circumstances under which it would occur. The other apostles were of the same mind. Hence they put it forward as a glorious hope whenever they preached and wrote. But it must not be forgotten that in the latest book in the New Testament, the Gospel of John, accompanied by his First Epistle, the subject not only has comparatively subordinate attention, but is also treated in a way totally different from that used in the other Gospels and in the Apostolic Epistles.

This is not a mere accident. Time had modified the thought of Christ's followers. The fact of his return was kept with undiminished faith and enthusiasm, but the time, manner, significance, and purpose of his coming occupied changed relations in their minds. This is the situation to-day. The lapse of centuries, the record of history, the development of Christianity, and the deepening of Christian experience have put the Christian student of the Bible in a position to place a sounder valuation upon the doctrine of Christ's second coming than was possible in a previous era. Ancient prophecy is clearer, the words of Jesus are plainer, the writings of the apostles

are more intelligible than ever. If we are deceived to-day by false teachers respecting the second coming of Christ, our fault will be greater than that of any who have gone before.

Moreover, we have the clear promise of divine help in the spiritual interpretation of the work of the gospel and the facts of human experience. Jesus said: "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit, when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he shall guide you into all the truth: for he shall not speak from himself; but what things soever he shall hear, *these* shall he speak: and he shall declare unto you the things that are to come. He shall glorify me; for he shall take of mine, and shall declare *it* unto you."[40]

[40] John 16. 12–14.

CHAPTER III

CHRIST'S GREAT PROPHECY OF HIS SECOND COMING

MARTIN LUTHER said of Adam before his disobedience, "I believe he saw as clearly for a distance of a hundred miles as we can see for half a mile, and so of all the senses." What loss in bodily and mental powers sin may have worked in the human race we can only conjecture. But we cannot doubt that the sinless Jesus had a mind undisturbed by the infirmities which vex other men. In him dwelt "all the fullness of the Godhead bodily."[1] His prophetic intelligence surpassed that of any ancient seer who spoke and wrote under divine inspiration before he came among men.

Therefore the words of Christ concerning his second advent must form the basis of all that we believe about that event; and whatever cannot be easily harmonized with his recorded teachings must be viewed with suspicion. In showing how much space was given to his second coming in his public ministry,

[1] Colossians 2. 9.

Christ's apocalyptic or eschatological[2] discourse at the close of his work was mentioned. Let it now be taken up in greater detail. Every reader should examine this discourse with great care and with repeated study until it stands out with sharpness in his mind.[3]

"Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?" is the threefold question which started our Lord's address. It was suggested by the declaration of Christ that the glorious temple on which they had been gazing with pride a little while before was doomed to destruction. We learn from the account in Mark's Gospel that the question was asked privately by four of the disciples—Peter,

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[2] The term "apocalypse" is from a Greek word meaning "uncovering," "disclosure," "revelation." It is frequently found in the New Testament. It implies an exalted knowledge of God's purposes, and is often used specifically with respect to the final triumph of Messiah's kingdom. The book of Revelation is in the original called "The Apocalypse of John." The apocalyptic literature of the Bible includes much in the prophecies of Isaiah, Ezekiel, Zechariah, Joel, and Daniel. Other apocalyptic writings of importance which did not obtain a place in the Bible are the Book of Enoch, the Apocalypse of Baruch, the Fourth Book of Esdras, the Assumption of Moses, and the Sibylline Oracles.

The term "eschatology" is from a Greek word meaning "the doctrine of last things." It embraces such subjects as death, the intermediate state, resurrection, judgment, the second advent, and the future existence of man.

[3] Matthew 24; Mark 13; Luke 21.

James, John, and Andrew;[4] and it was to them alone that Christ gave this wonderful prediction.

Principles of Interpretation

Thus we see that what is here recorded was really a conversation on "last things" rather than a set address. Jesus and his disciples had reached the Mount of Olives, where they paused to look back upon the city, of which the temple was the most conspicuous and important structure. Sitting down to rest a while with the small group of disciples who were specially excited by what he had said about the destruction of this noble edifice, our Lord began to talk of the mysterious future. To think of what followed as a formal speech is to increase the difficulty of understanding it. He was not delivering a sermon; he was speaking familiarly with his closest friends on a subject of the deepest interest to them and him.

This will explain in part why it is impossible to make a perfect analysis of the message given at the time. It is a flowing talk which winds in and out like a gentle stream through a wooded and heavily shaded valley. Every

[4] Mark 13. 3. Observe that these men are the two pairs of brothers who were called at the beginning of Christ's ministry.

careful reader will see that, while the destruction of Jerusalem is the starting point of this discourse, it soon develops something more remote in time and more impressive in character. Many scholars have imagined that they could tell just where Jesus ceased speaking of the national disaster soon to befall the Jews and began to describe the scenes connected with his return and the final judgment. But these writers show great disagreement as to the precise spot where this division appears. It is quite clear that the earlier portion of the record refers generally to the overthrow of Jerusalem, while the later is concerned with Christ's second advent and the end of the age. But the attempt to mark off within strictly defined limits a certain section for one event, and another section for the other event, is not successful. Very ingenious parallels have been drawn between the predictions about the destruction of Jerusalem and those relating to the final judgment, but these devices are not convincing. Some scholars insist that the whole discourse is devoted exclusively to the national catastrophe of the Jews, while others claim that almost all of it applies to the second coming of Christ.

No such extreme position is warranted. The utmost one can say is that in this address

Jesus is "forecasting the future from the moment of utterance to the final judgment." In the immediate foreground stands the destruction of Jerusalem, beyond which stretch events preceding Christ's return, the whole meaning of which time and eternity alone can reveal. There is such a blending of the predictions in these three accounts that it is not possible to separate all the elements and assign them with certainty to their several divisions, but many of the passages can readily be so placed. After the lapse of centuries we are able to see that our Lord gave marks by which future generations could unmistakably reach the actual intention of much that he said at this time. Some of his sentences surely apply to the destruction of Jerusalem, and cannot apply to anything else; and others with equal certainty refer to the end of the age and the final judgment, and cannot be explained in any other connection. But there are passages which could be interpreted as bearing upon either or both. As yet no one can say with certainty to which event utterances of this general character are to be applied, if only one was in our Lord's mind.

Practical Aim of the Address

But the lessons of faithfulness and watchful-

ness which Christ sought to teach by this discourse would be just as effective with those who heard it, whichever event was intended, and the application to our own spiritual needs is not affected by our inability to determine the question. Here we touch a most useful distinction, which should be a guiding principle in all our efforts to interpret Christ's words. Many persons study this prophecy only to speculate about its hidden meanings. They have a theory to uphold, or they have an itching desire to know that which could have little or no bearing on the spiritual life if it were perfectly understood. Our Lord spoke to these disciples, and through them to us, with no purpose to gratify an idle curiosity. He was moved by eagerness to urge upon them unswerving fidelity in the face of every difficulty, and he left them in no doubt that the day was coming when reckoning would be made with them in respect to their constancy to truth. How soon that crisis would occur he did not undertake to say, but that it was inevitable he declared in unmistakable terms. Therefore, it behooved every disciple to be vigilant and faithful to the highest degree. This is the duty which Christ laid on every follower to the end of time by means of his apocalyptic discourse.

Admonitions of this sort were given so frequently during Christ's ministry that we need not be surprised to find in the records of this discourse some things which are written elsewhere in the Gospels. For example, long before the occasion under consideration Jesus is reported by Luke to have used the comparison of his second coming with the suddenness and unexpectedness of the flood and the destruction of the cities of the plain, which is set down in Matthew's Gospel as a part of this discourse.[5] Again, we find that what Christ said about the necessity of watchfulness, as illustrated by the householder and the thief, and the faithful and unfaithful servants, is in Matthew's Gospel assigned to this discourse, while Luke inserts it in a very different connection.[6] It is not unlikely, therefore, that we have in these records of Christ's great prophecy not only what he said at this particular time, but also certain other things on the same subject which he said at various times. These utterances on different occasions the writers have placed here for the purpose of bringing our Lord's teaching on the matter into one exhibit, thus serving the

[5] Luke 17. 20–37; compared with Matthew 24. 17, 23, 28, 37, 41.

[6] Luke 12. 39–46; compared with Matthew 24. 43–51.

convenience of the reader, and at the same time satisfying the author's sense of unity, for each wrote in his own way.

The feeling that this is probable is further strengthened by the fact that at the end of the discourse a variety of illustrations is used to enforce the injunction to be watchful, any one of which would have been sufficient for the purpose. In Matthew we have the picture of the householder who would have fortified himself against the thief if he had supposed the robber would come, and also the picture of the evil servant who says, "My lord tarrieth," and begins to beat his fellow servants. In Mark in the same connection we have pictures of the man sojourning in another country who has appointed each of his servants to his work and has charged the porter to watch. In Luke we have the warning against permitting the heart to be engrossed with surfeiting and drunkenness and the cares of this life, so that the coming of Christ may appear as a snare. There are also immediately connected with the discourse in the account in Matthew the parables of the virgins, of the talents, of the judgment, in which all nations are divided into the sheep and the goats, and others to which we have already referred.[7] It is highly improbable

[7] See pages 37-39.

that these were all given on one occasion, though some of them have such perfect fitness that their omission at the end of the discourse would be a serious loss. As a climax of noble grandeur, the parable of the final judgment of all the nations[8] at the coming of the Son of man can only be compared with the last paragraph in the Sermon on the Mount which serves a like purpose.[9]

No true believer can doubt that the Holy Spirit has preserved in these three accounts every essential utterance of our Lord on this great occasion. But the narrators have written in their own several styles of composition. Every reader can see that, even if he has no knowledge of the Greek language. The English translation shows that each man wrote somewhat differently than the others, though the main outlines and much of the detail are similar. All the circumstances we have been rehearsing—the conversational style of Christ's address, the practical purpose of our Lord, the use of one event as the type of the other, the introduction of materials previously employed elsewhere, the freedom of narration permitted by inspiration to the several authors—help us to discern why it is difficult, if not impossible,

[8] Matthew 25. 31–46.
[9] Matthew 7. 24–29.

always to say to which event the primary reference of a particular passage was made. But the impending fate of Jerusalem and the final judgment are each in a true sense the coming of the Son of man. Both mark the end of an age. One stands as the symbol of the other. The time of each is left indefinite, though signs of the approach of each are intimated. In several instances the same words could be used of both events.

It is very evident that in the minds of the disciples was the conviction that the things concerning which they inquired would all occur together, the destruction of Jerusalem, the return of Christ and the end of the age being regarded by them as three phases of the same event. When they reported our Lord's reply, of course, they were still under that impression, for he did not attempt to correct their confusion. It was not the first time that Christ had refrained from setting right their misunderstandings. He knew that time and experience would make plain what was now dark. When we consider how mysterious are many things connected with the future, we need not be surprised that these four disciples were confused in this instance, or that they transmitted their confusion to those who afterward incorporated their story in the written narratives of the

three Gospels which contain it.[10] This will explain many difficulties in the discourse.

The Foreground of the Picture

According to each of the accounts, Jesus begins by warning his disciples against the possibility of being deceived by what may be regarded as signs of his coming. He admonishes them not to be duped by appearances. False Christs shall arise, wars and rumors of wars shall multiply, nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there shall be famines and earthquakes, and pestilences, and all kinds of tribulations. But these are not to be hastily taken as tokens of impending judgment.[11] "*These things* must needs come to pass; but the end is not yet,"[12] says Jesus. "All these things are the beginning of travail."[13]

The warnings given to the disciples ought to have kept them from the error of assuming that the second coming of Christ and the destruction of Jerusalem were parts of the same event, and also ought now to keep people from

[10] It is believed that Peter is the apostle whose preaching gave Mark, the substance of his Gospel, which was probably the first to appear.

[11] Matthew 24. 4–8; Mark 13. 5–8; Luke 21. 8–11.

[12] Matthew 24. 6; Mark 13. 7; see also Luke 21. 9.

[13] Matthew 24. 8; Mark 13. 8; see also Luke 21. 9.

assuming that any great catastrophe, such as the present European war, is sure evidence that Christ's second coming and the end of the age are at hand.

Christ then throws into the immediate foreground those things which must occur in the lives of his disciples before the impending judgment on Jerusalem can be fulfilled. They are to have great tribulations and to suffer great persecution, "But he that endureth to the end, the same shall be saved."[14] Every detail in this prediction was fulfilled before and during the siege of Jerusalem. The false Christs appeared. "Even now have there arisen many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last hour."[15] "Wars and rumors of wars" were

[14] Matthew 24. 4–13:

And Jesus answered and said unto them, Take heed that no man lead you astray. For many shall come in my name saying, I am the Christ; and shall lead many astray. And ye shall hear of wars and rumors of wars; see that ye be not troubled; for *these things* must needs come to pass; but the end is not yet. For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; and there shall be famines and earthquakes in divers places. But all these things are the beginning of travail. Then shall they deliver you up unto tribulation, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all the nations for my name's sake. And then shall many stumble, and shall deliver up one another, and shall hate one another. And many false prophets shall arise, and shall lead many astray. And because iniquity shall be multiplied, the love of the many shall wax cold. But he that endureth to the end, the same shall be saved.

(Compare Mark 13. 5–8; Luke 21. 8–19.)

[15] 1 John 2. 18.

abundant in Judæa from the day of Christ's address till Jerusalem was assaulted about forty years later. Jews were massacred in many places within and far beyond Palestine. "Famines and earthquakes in divers places" are recorded by historians of the period. True Christians were persecuted unto death, and unfaithful disciples turned against one another. That false prophets, suborned by the enemies of truth, stirred the people into a delirium of excitement is well known from both secular and sacred writers.[16] Of course, "the love of many" would "wax cold," since they were not sufficiently grounded to endure persecutions so terrible.

The Destruction of Jerusalem

Now follows in all three of the narratives a description of the vast tribulation which is to fall upon the people who are especially dear to the human heart of Jesus, and concerning which he gives kindly instruction to those who would escape its most awful miseries.[17] Again

[16] 1 John 4. 1, 2, 3.

[17] Matthew 24. 15–28:

When therefore ye see the abomination of desolation, which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (let him that readeth understand), then let them that are in Judæa flee unto the mountains: let him that is on the housetop not go down to take out the things that are in his house: and let him that is in the field not return back to take his cloak. But woe unto them that are with child and to them

we see the plain marks of identification with the destruction of Jerusalem and the consequent desolation of the Jews. The polluting of the temple both by Jews and aliens through civil discord and idolatrous profanation—the very climax of sacrilege—literally came to pass. The horrors of the siege cannot be set forth in words. Within the walls of the city was crowded a vast concourse of people who had come to celebrate the passover. The Jewish patriots were divided into three factions, and these frequently turned from their combined assaults upon the besieging Roman army to furious conflicts among themselves. The temple areas were drenched in human gore, which was mingled with the blood of the religious sacrifices. Captive Jews were crucified

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that give suck in those days! And pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, neither on a sabbath: for then shall be great tribulation, such as hath not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, nor ever shall be. And except those days had been shortened, no flesh would have been saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened. Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is the Christ, or, Here; believe *it* not. For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders; so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect. Behold, I have told you beforehand. If therefore they shall say unto you, Behold, he is in the wilderness; go not forth: Behold, he is in the inner chambers; believe *it* not. For as the lightning cometh forth from the east, and is seen even unto the west; so shall be the coming of the Son of man. Wheresoever the carcase is, there will the eagles be gathered together.

(Compare Mark 13. 14–23; Luke 21. 20–24.)

by hundreds in plain sight of their kinsmen, and the wretched people inside the walls perished by famine and indescribable cruelties. More than a million Jews were slain during this siege, which lasted six months, and a hundred thousand were sold into slavery. When Jerusalem fell the Jewish nation ceased. In a very deep sense it was indeed "the end of the age."

The advice to flee to the mountains and to avoid being detained by any wish to recover personal property, the miseries predicted for nursing mothers, for those whose flight was in the winter, for those who on the Sabbath must for conscience sake tarry in their flight, and the whole vivid picture of tribulation "such as hath not been seen from the beginning of the world," find justification in the actual scenes of that frightful catastrophe.

Luke introduces his record of this section of the discourse, not, as Matthew and Mark, by a quotation from Daniel, but with the words, "When ye see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that her desolation is at hand," and concludes it with the words, "And Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled.[18] It was truly the end of an age. The

[18] Luke 21. 20, 24.

words suggest that the overthrow of Jerusalem would be followed by a long era of desolation, which is precisely what has occurred. The words, "and except those days had been shortened, no flesh would have been saved," seem perfectly natural when applied to this catastrophe; as do also the words "but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened."[19] We need ask no other application.

When Jesus says: "This generation shall not pass away, till all these things be accomplished,"[20] he refers without doubt to the destruction of Jerusalem. Those who make this passage a part of Christ's prediction of his second coming try to show that the word "generation" means the whole Jewish race, and say that it is obvious that this generation, or race, has not vanished, and, according to prophecy, never will. But this is straining beyond reason and need not detain us. Without a theory to support probably no one would ever think of calling "this generation" anything but what it would naturally mean, the people living in the time when Christ was speaking. Of course the removing of Judaism as the great obstacle to the gospel was the beginning of the end, and the destruction of Jerusalem was a symbol of

[19] Matthew 24. 22.
[20] Matthew 24. 34; Mark 13. 30; Luke 21. 32.

final judgment. In that sense the passages might be shaped toward the second advent, but this is not the simple interpretation which plain sense would dictate.

We know that the disciples believed that Christ's second coming would occur either in connection with or shortly after the destruction of Jerusalem. This will account for the fact that in reporting this discourse, when the disasters connected with the fall of the capital have been described, Matthew's Gospel says, "Immediately after the tribulation of those days,"[21] and Mark's "In those days, after that tribulation,"[22] terrible manifestations of nature would presage the instant coming of Christ to judgment. Their inference from the words of our Lord was wrong, as we know, but as time in Christ's view is not measured by our little standards, we need have no trouble in reconciling this prediction with the facts. The interval may seem long to us, but to him it is but a watch in the night.

While it is true that the parable of the fig tree is one of those universal illustrations which in this instance could be applied either to the tokens that the destruction of Jerusalem was approaching, or that the end of the world

[21] Matthew 24. 29.
[22] Mark 13. 24.

was hastening, yet when found in such close connection with the statement, "This generation shall not pass away till all be fulfilled," as recorded in each Gospel, it would seem to be best understood in connection with the nearer event.

A similar judgment may be expressed with regard to several of the parables used by our Lord to illustrate the necessity of watchfulness and faithfulness, though this cannot be said with certainty concerning those illustrations which end with some such words as "So shall be the coming of the Son of man."[23]

The Farther Event

We may now consider those parts of this discourse which clearly and unmistakably point to the second advent of our Lord. When Jesus says, "This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world for a testimony unto all the nations; and then shall the end come,"[24] he is giving a note of time concerning the era of his return. By no natural method of interpretation can these words be applied to the destruction of Jerusalem or the beginning of what is called the Christian dispensation, though persons with a theory to support have

[23] Matthew 24. 39, 44.
[24] Matthew 24. 14; Mark 14. 10.

really undertaken to give them this application.[25]

"For as the lightning cometh forth from the east, and is seen even unto the west; so shall be the coming of the Son of man,"[26] is evidently a straight declaration that, though his return is to be sudden, it will be unmistakable and the whole world will know that he has come back.

Yet the exact time of his return is hidden from every mind except that of the divine Father. "Of that day and hour knoweth no one, not even the angels of heaven, neither the Son, but the Father only."[27]

However, there is a considerable period to intervene before his return, for "Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled."[28] We are still in this stretch of history, and no man knows how much longer it will continue.

Whatever length of time will precede the second coming of Christ, he will find the world preoccupied with its customary order of life when he arrives. "And as *were* the days of Noah, so shall be the coming of the Son of man.

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[25] See pages 102-104, where this question has attention.
[26] Matthew 24. 27.
[27] Matthew 24. 36; Mark 13. 32; Luke 21. 36.
[28] Luke 21. 24.

For as in those days which were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, and they knew not until the flood came and took them all away; so shall be the coming of the Son of man."[29]

What stupendous changes are to take place in the world at Christ's second coming we may learn from this impressive prophecy: "But immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken: and then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory."[30]

It may be said with perfect reverence for God's holy word that this language is highly figurative, as is much of the ancient prophetic

[29] Matthew 24. 37–39. Compare Luke 17. 26, 27.

[30] Matthew 24. 29–31; see also Mark 13. 24–27. Luke's language is most picturesque and varied (Luke 21. 25–28):

And there shall be signs in the sun and moon and stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, in perplexity for the roaring of the sea and the billows; men fainting for fear, and for expectation of the things which are coming on the world: for the powers of the heavens shall be shaken. And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. But when these things begin to come to pass, look up, and lift up your heads; because your redemption draweth nigh. See page 236.

literature, with which the minds of Jesus and his disciples were filled.[31] When Christ comes to take up the government of the world in person, vast and revolutionary changes will occur in the social, political, and moral structures, as has always been shown whenever God by some direct visitation has interfered with the history of nations. It is unprofitable to guess at the precise meaning of these symbolical words. It is enough to know that at Christ's coming mighty transformations will result. If the reader feels that to suggest symbolism here is to depart from our fixed purpose to take the Bible as we find it, or that hinting at a figurative interpretation of this passage is "handling the word of God deceitfully," he should turn to Peter's address on the day of Pentecost and read how the apostle made the prophecy of Joel an explanation of what was then happening:

"And it shall be in the last days, saith God,
I will pour forth of my Spirit upon all flesh:
And your sons and your daughters shall
prophesy,
And your young men shall see visions,
And your old men shall dream dreams:
Yea, and on my servants and on my hand-
maidens in those days

[31] Isaiah 13. 10; 34. 4; Ezekiel 32. 7, 8; Amos 9. 13; Joel 11. 28–32.

Will I pour forth of my Spirit; and they shall
prophesy.
And I will show wonders in the heaven above,
And signs on the earth beneath;
Blood, and fire, and vapor and smoke:
The sun shall be turned into darkness,
And the moon into blood,
Before the day of the Lord come,
That great and notable *day;*
And it shall be, that whosoever shall call on
the name of the Lord shall be saved."[32]

Now, the physical portents described in this prophecy did not come to pass, though other wonders equally great did occur. Yet Peter says what befell on that day was in fulfillment of what had been predicted by Joel centuries before, and Peter was under the guidance of the same Holy Spirit who had inspired Joel. Our Lord's language is pictorial and vivid, and it makes a profound impression, as he intended it should. Similar prophecies are found in the Old Testament,[33] and the same figures are amplified in the book of Revelation and elsewhere.[34] They are not wise who belittle these words by making them refer to eclipses or showers of meteors, or who stretch them to

[32] Acts 2. 7–21; see also Joel 2. 28–32.
[33] See page 70, footnote 31.
[34] Revelation 20. 11; 21. 1; 2 Peter 3. 10-13.

mean the literal destruction of sun, moon, and stars. On the promise of a new heaven and a new earth we may rely, but to insist that the prophecy in this discourse requires a dissolution of nature is unwarranted.

That Christ will, at his return, accompanied by a convoy of angels, "gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other"[35] is one of those sublime facts without which his second coming would have no great significance, but upon which the soul of the believer rests with unlimited comfort and assurance.

Looking Backward and Forward

Let us now return to the incident which led to Christ's remarkable prophecy. He and his disciples have been surveying the temple, the courts of which had been polluted by unholy practices, an act of profanation which Jesus had but recently rebuked with stern words and deeds. Our Lord has just been saying that this splendid temple, its white marble structures glistening like a mountain of snow, its gilded roofs and pinnacles shining with dazzling luster, shall one day be utterly overthrown and with it shall fall the sacred city over whose approaching ruin he has but a

[35] Matthew 24. 31; Mark 13. 27.

little time since poured out a heart-breaking lamentation. In the Saviour's mind the uppermost thoughts are the transitory nature of all things earthly, and the everlasting security of his spiritual mission. "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away."[36] This utterance is the key to the whole discourse. His mind sweeps over the area of time yet to be and hovers over the triumphant end of the age when he shall deliver up the Kingdom to his Father.

But the question of the disciples, "When shall these things be?" constrains him to begin his prophecy at the point of time which he and they are occupying. The destruction of Jerusalem and its attendant circumstances of misery and woe—these are analogous to the final judgment of the world. Indeed, they are the fulfillment of the predicted punishment of unfaithful Israel. They constitute the tribulation at the end of Judaism which forecasts the final tribulation at the end of the world. Here we have a prefiguring and symbolizing of the judgment which would be pronounced upon all mankind when he should return.

Now, it is a fact which the history of two thousand years has established, that nothing

[36] Matthew 24. 35.

so epoch-making, so universal in its effect upon the progress of Christianity, has appeared since Christ's departure; and it is safe to predict that nothing more significant will occur in the interval, long or short, which precedes his return. The breaking up of the Jewish nation and the scattering of Israel far and wide was the greatest and most revolutionary event which could mark the close of one dispensation and the beginning of another.

But there was even more than the blending of two widely separated events, something more than the mere analogy between one event and the other. The destruction of Jerusalem and the desolation of Israel actually stood in the foreground of a picture, the vista of which extended into the far-off ages. In the immediate future stood this great catastrophe, and far beyond it, rising like a distant peak above the broad plain stretching between, arose the tragic fact of the ultimate judgment of the world. Something like this occurred in the experience of the ancient Hebrew prophets. They predicted a visitation upon Israel, followed by a deliverance through the Messiah. Their language would indicate that they thought this was coming almost immediately. The delineations have all the coloring and circumstances of a local, national event. So the

matter stood in the foreground of their inspired imaginations. But we who live in later times know that their prophecies had to do with an event long removed from their point of vision. Seven hundred years after Isaiah proclaimed the coming of the Messiah, Christ entered the world; not to be the deliverer of the Jewish nation, but to be the Christ of all nations. Isaiah prophesied about Judah and Jerusalem and about the glory of the Messianic kingdom. We see his predictions fulfilled, not in a local prince such as he described, the head of the Jewish nation, but a cosmopolitan deliverer to whose standard all peoples shall ultimately yield.

Thus, when Jesus predicted the final judgment there stood in his mind first of all the terrible desolation of Judaism, and far beyond that, through the haze of many centuries, appeared the final judgment, of which the siege of Jerusalem was a type, an analogy, a symbol. Those who heard him in this great discourse saw only the near event, and from his language, which perhaps was open to such a construction, they argued that the end of the age and the return of their Lord would be coincident with the final judgment. This confusion they transmitted to following generations.

Reading the matter now in the light of his-

tory, we can readily mark the distinction. We see the type, the analogy, the symbol: and we look across the long centuries which have followed and say that Christ surely meant that his coming again was an event of the remote future. So clear, however, was his own vision and with such ease did he sweep over the vast territory lying between these two points that they virtually appeared together. The distance vanished and the sharply outlined facts came into immediate relationship. Thus, in certain parts of the world, where the atmosphere is exceedingly clear, mountains which are many miles apart seem to stand so close to the beholder that he could hurl a stone against their sides. But when he attempts to do this he finds that the missile falls far short of the object at which he has aimed. So, through the clear vision that Christ had of the future the far-off event was brought into such proximity to the immediate time that in his own speech there is little to mark the space which lies between. History is day by day slowly but surely measuring the distance.

CHAPTER IV

HOW AND WHY IS CHRIST COMING AGAIN?

In the discourse which we studied in the last chapter we find plain intimations of the manner, purpose, and time of our Lord's return. These we shall now examine more closely and compare them with predictions contained in other passages of the New Testament.

The Manner of Christ's Second Coming

It might be held that the precise way in which our Lord will return to the earth is a matter of minor importance, if it were not for the fact that the character of his second advent bears directly upon the purpose of his coming. When he made his first bodily appearance in the world it was as a helpless babe in the arms of an obscure peasant mother. When he comes the second time it will be as the risen, ascended, glorified and triumphant Lord of angels and men.

The Scriptures are very explicit about this. Jesus said, "The Son of man shall come in the

glory of his Father with his angels";[1] that he "shall sit on the throne of his glory,"[2] and that he shall be seen "coming on the clouds of heaven" with power and great glory.[3] He drew a vivid picture of regal splendor in the words, "But when the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the angels with him, then shall he sit on the throne of his glory: and before him shall be gathered all the nations."[4] It is as a king that he is coming.

As befits royalty, he will come with great publicity. As at the destruction of Jerusalem false prophets and false Christs arose, and as through all succeeding ages similar deceivers have appeared, so in the days to come impostors will brazenly set up their claims to divine authority. But Jesus warned his disciples, "Behold, I have told you beforehand. If therefore they shall say unto you, Behold, he is in the wilderness; go not forth: Behold, he is in the inner chambers; believe *it* not. For as the lightning cometh forth from the east and is seen even unto the west; so shall be the coming of the Son of man."[5]

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[1] Matthew 16. 27.

[2] Matthew 19. 28.

[3] Matthew 26. 64; see also Mark 14. 62. Compare Matthew 24. 30; Mark 13. 26; Luke 21. 27.

[4] Matthew 25. 31.

[5] Matthew 24. 25–28; see also Mark 13. 21–23.

There will be no chance of mistake. He will be revealed universally, not as at his first advent, when wise men came from the east inquiring "Where is he that is born King of the Jews?"[6] When he returns "every eye shall see him, and they that pierced him."[7] If people who are deceived by such avowed seers as "Pastor" Russell, Mary Baker Eddy, and others who have professed to usher in the new age by a spiritual second coming of Christ, had been better students of the Bible, they would have saved themselves from much humiliation. Christ's return will be unmistakable, and the fact of it will not be concealed from any creature.

Yet our Lord's coming will be so sudden and unexpected that the most frequent figure to characterize it is that of the "thief in the night." This is the simile used by Christ himself;[8] and it is adopted by Paul,[9] by Peter,[10] and by the author of the Apocalypse.[11] Literalists might insist that such passages mean that Christ at his second coming will enter the world unobserved; but this would be pressing a figure beyond the plain purpose for which it was chosen.

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[6] Matthew 2. 2.
[7] Revelation 1. 7.
[8] See Matthew 24. 43.
[9] 1 Thessalonians 5. 2.
[10] 2 Peter 3. 10.
[11] See Revelation 3. 3; 16. 15.

It is recorded that while the disciples were watching the ascension of their Lord they were addressed by two men in white raiment who said: "Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye looking into heaven? this Jesus, who was received up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye beheld him going into heaven."[12] Some scholars claim that the phrase, "in like manner," simply refers to the fact of Christ's return, and not to the process of it. As he went into heaven, so he will come out of heaven. The distinction is of no serious weight.

A detail given by Paul is most interesting. He says, "The Lord himself shall descend from heaven, with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God."[13] It would not seem important, apart from the relation of the manner of Christ's coming to his purpose, whether he returned on a radiant cloud, or a foam-crested wave of the sea; in solitary grandeur, or surrounded by a pompous retinue; with silence accompanying him, or attended by angelic choirs and celestial trumpeters. But it is the King who is coming to take his throne, and before him every knee shall bow, and to him every tongue

[12] Acts 1. 11.

[13] 1 Thessalonians 4. 16.

shall make confession of submission to his scepter.[14]

The Purpose of Christ's Second Coming

One of the parables Jesus employs to illustrate the significance of his return describes a man who, before taking a journey to a foreign country, calls his servants together and places his property in their hands, assigning to them in trust the proportion he feels that each is capable of handling. "Now after a long time the lord of those servants cometh, and maketh a reckoning with them," and each is rewarded according to the manner in which he has discharged his responsibility.[15] Christ's return will be distinguished, therefore, by the measuring out of recompense. "And he shall send forth his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, and from one end of the heaven to the other."[16] They shall not only be separated from the mass of mankind, but they shall also be appointed to their eternal destiny of blessing. The expectation of this was a perpetual joy to Paul, who could say at the close of his ministry: "I am already

[14] Philippians 2. 4–11.
[15] Matthew 25. 14–30.
[16] Matthew 24. 31; see also Mark 13. 27.

being offered, and the time of my departure is come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give to me at that day; and not to me only, but also to all them that have loved his appearing."[17]

Judgment

Retribution as well as reward is necessarily meted out by the Lord who comes to make reckoning with his servants. In Christ's apocalyptic discourse the punishment of the faithless is by suggestion and implication made more prominent than the recompense of the faithful. Yet all are to be judged, for judgment looks both to the righteous and the unrighteous. "When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the angels with him, then shall he sit on the throne of his glory: and before him shall be gathered all the nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as the shepherd separateth the sheep from the goats; and he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left."[18]

The judgment includes not merely the Jewish people, but all kindreds and tongues

[17] 2 Timothy 4. 6–8.
[18] Matthew 25. 31–33.

on the face of the earth. The gospel will then have been preached everywhere, or its ideals will have been presented to everybody, so that all will have had opportunity to accept the redemption which is in Christ. The judgment will, therefore, be fair even when gauged by human standards of equity, though entirely apart from man's opinions the Judge of all the earth must be incapable of doing wrong.[19] "He will judge the world in righteousness."[20] The heathen who perished without having heard of Christ will be judged on a basis well portrayed in the words, "Inasmuch as ye did it [or did it not] unto one of these my brethren, *even* these least, ye did it [or did it not] unto me."[21] That apparently will also be the determining factor in the judgment of all. The ancient Jews will be judged according to their response to the word of the Lord, however communicated in the ages preceding the advent of the Messiah. The whole human family will be under judicial scrutiny when the Son of man comes at the end of the world.[22]

How large a part this expectation of judgment played in the thought of the early Christians we see from the frequent references made to it in the Acts of the Apostles and in the

[19] Genesis 18. 25.
[20] Psalm 9. 8.
[21] Matthew 25. 40, 45.
[22] 2 Corinthians 5. 10; Romans 14. 10–12.

various apostolic epistles. Peter, addressing Cornelius and his household of kinsmen and friends, declares that Christ commanded him "to preach unto the people, and to testify that this is he who is ordained of God *to be* the Judge of the living and the dead."[23] Paul, standing on Mars' Hill, tells the Athenians: "The times of ignorance therefore God overlooked; but now he commandeth men that they should all everywhere repent: inasmuch as he hath appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness by the man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead."[24]

Christ is pictured as peering into the innermost recesses of the soul, "in the day when God shall judge the secrets of men, according to my gospel, by Jesus Christ."[25] He is described as opening all that is obscure in human life. "Wherefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and make manifest the counsels of the hearts; and then shall each man have his praise from God."[26] It is he before whom we are to strive to appear "unreprovable in the day of our Lord Jesus

[23] Acts 10. 42; see also 2 Timothy 4. 1.
[24] Acts 17. 30, 31.
[25] Romans 2. 16.
[26] 1 Corinthians 4. 5.

Christ,"[27] and in whose presence, if we are faithful, we "may have whereof to glory in the day of Christ."[28] We are to wait for God's Son from heaven, "whom he raised from the dead, *even* Jesus, who delivereth us from the wrath to come."[29] It is he who is to establish our "hearts unblamable in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints."[30]

The estate of men in the future is made to depend on their earthly attitude toward Him who is coming to judge all. "Whosoever shall be ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of man also shall be ashamed of him, when he cometh in the glory of his Father."[31] To stand unabashed in his presence is the strong incentive to fidelity. "And now, *my* little children, abide in him; that, if he shall be manifested, we may have boldness, and not be ashamed before him at his coming."[32]

Retribution

It is the failure to meet the test of fidelity

[27] 1 Corinthians, 1. 8; see also Philippians 1. 10; 1 Thessalonians 5. 23; 1 Timothy 6. 13–15.

[28] Philippians 2. 16.

[29] 1 Thessalonians 1. 10.

[30] 1 Thessalonians 3. 13.

[31] Mark 8. 38; Luke 9. 26.

[32] 1 John 2. 28.

which will bring incalculable loss and enduring penalty at the coming of the Lord. The sharp contrast between the felicity of the faithful and the misery of the faithless is vividly expressed in the parable of the tares. "The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that cause stumbling, and them that do iniquity, and shall cast them into the furnace of fire; there shall be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth."[33] This will take place "at the revelation of the Lord Jesus Christ from heaven with the angels of his power in flaming fire, rendering vengeance to them that know not God, and to them that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus; who shall suffer punishment, even eternal destruction from the face of the Lord and from the glory of his might, when he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be marveled at in all them that believed (because our testimony unto you was believed) in that day."[34] The dark aspects of the judgment, on which the apostles dwell with an emphasis which is startling, seem to warrant the appeal to fear which many preachers of Christ in our day use with great effect. "Behold, the Lord came with ten thousands

[33] Matthew 13. 24–30; 37–43.
[34] 2 Thessalonians 1. 7–10.

of his holy ones, to execute judgment upon all, and to convict all the ungodly of their works of ungodliness which they have ungodly wrought, and of all the hard things which ungodly sinners have spoken against him."[35]

Yet what is so sinister to the wicked is everlasting blessedness to the righteous. The reward of fidelity is a character conformed to that of Christ. "Beloved, now are we children of God, and it is not yet made manifest what we shall be. We know that, if he shall be manifested, we shall be like him; for we shall see him even as he is. And every one that hath this hope *set* on him purifieth himself, even as he is pure."[36]

Resurrection

Judgment necessitates resurrection. Nothing is specifically said about this in Christ's apocalyptic discourse, though it is implied in the gathering of the elect from the four quarters of the globe. But in the parable of the final judgment[37] it is affirmed that "all the nations" shall appear before Christ at his coming, and this expression must include all who sleep in the dust, as well as those who will be treading the globe at his appearing.

[35] Jude 14, 15; see also Revelation 14. 14–16; Revelation 20. 12–15.
[36] 1 John 3. 2, 3.
[37] Matthew 25. 31–46.

The moment our minds are turned to the connection between judgment and resurrection we see how indispensable is the fourth Gospel. John says nothing about Christ's apocalyptic discourse. He was thoroughly acquainted with its contents, having been one of the disciples to whom it was privately communicated. Yet he makes no mention of it. Either he thought this unnecessary for his purpose, which was to persuade men to believe in Christ unto eternal life,[38] or he felt that what he was to report of Christ's teachings on judgment and resurrection was a sufficient and, at the time he wrote, a more important contribution to the subject.

Those who think that the second coming of Christ, as described in decidedly materialistic or physical terms by the other evangelists and some of the apostles, is the one staple doctrine of the Christian religion, without which all other tenets are meaningless, will have some difficulty in reconciling themselves to the significant silence of John in respect to these features so prominent in certain other writings of the New Testament. John does not avoid the idea of Christ's coming to final judgment, but he does not make it of central interest. Others had said nothing about

[38] John 20. 31.

resurrection as preceding judgment. That thought would be implied even when not expressed, but he gives it much attention.

Furthermore, he brings out the spiritual meaning of the resurrection as a present experience. When Jesus told Martha that her brother should rise again, she said unto him, "I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection of the last day." Then Jesus said, "I am the resurrection, and the life; he that believeth on me, though he die, yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth and believeth on me shall never die."[39] Here is a clear reference both to the final summons of the body to judgment and also to the possibility of a personal and present resurrection through faith in Jesus Christ, the latter being spiritual and not material.

Present Spiritual Realities

In the great passage, John 5:25-29 inclusive, we have the same distinction clearly brought out. It is preceded by a general statement: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth him that sent me, hath eternal life, and cometh not into judgment, but hath passed out of death into life."[40] Jesus then proceeds to make even

[39] John 11. 25, 26.

[40] John 5. 24.

more definite his explanation of the spiritual resurrection, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, the hour cometh, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God; and they that hear shall live."[41] Here it is very apparent that what is implied is a spiritual resurrection. All the people who are dead, in the sense of being without the spiritual life of fellowship with God, who hear his voice and respond to it shall live, in the sense of coming into that fellowship. Jesus reiterates the statement that he has the power thus to give life to those who are dead in trespasses and sins. "For as the Father hath life in himself, even so gave he to the Son also to have life in himself."[42] There is coupled with this a like "authority to execute judgment, because he is a son of man."[43] This apparently creates astonishment in the minds of those who are listening to him, and he then proceeds to pass over from a consideration of the spiritual resurrection and judgment to the final resurrection and judgment. He says, "Marvel not at this: for the hour cometh, in which all that are in the tombs shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the

[41] John 5. 25.
[42] John 5. 26.
[43] John 5. 27.

resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of judgment."[44] Here, it is to be noted, all that are in their graves are to hear his voice. But not all of these are to live, in a spiritual sense, but only those who have done good. Those who have done evil are reserved for condemnation. It is not said of them that they shall live. The implication is that in the spiritual significance they shall continue to be dead. Thus, at the final judgment only those who have lived spiritually are appointed to everlasting glory, and those who have not lived are appointed to everlasting shame. This has an important bearing upon John's conception of the second coming of Christ. He believes thoroughly in the final judgment, but he also puts forward what was overlooked by the other writers, namely, the fact that the process of resurrection and judgment is continuously going forward.

In the farewell address of Jesus as recorded by John (14th to 17th chapters inclusive) Jesus is represented as elaborating an even more luminous conception of his spiritual power among men. He says, "If I go and prepare a place for you, I come again, and will receive you unto myself, that where I am, there ye may be also."[45] That is a plain intimation

[44] John 5. 28, 29.

[45] John 14. 3.

of the final coming of our Lord to reward those who have been faithful to him. But this is not to be regarded as his only coming, for he also says that by the spiritual union with them they shall be conscious of his presence. "I will not leave you desolate: I come unto you. Yet a little while, and the world beholdeth me no more; but ye behold me: because I live, ye shall live also. In that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you."[46] In the sixteenth chapter this idea is still further developed. Here he shows that the coming of the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, is really his own coming to give spiritual guidance and illumination to them. "Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he shall guide you into all the truth: for he shall not speak from himself; but what things soever he shall hear, *these* shall he speak: and he shall declare unto you the things that are to come. He shall glorify me: for he shall take of mine, and shall declare *it* unto you. All things whatsoever the Father hath are mine: therefore said I, that he taketh of mine, and shall declare *it* unto you."[47]

Some devout students of the New Testament say that this explains what Jesus meant when he said, "There are some of them that stand

[46] John 14. 18–20. [47] John 16. 13–15.

here, who shall in no wise taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom."[48] They felt this spiritual presence in their own hearts after his bodily presence had been withdrawn from them, and they had a mighty confirmation of it when, on the day of Pentecost, with great power the Son of man did manifest himself by various wondrous exhibitions and especially in the conversion of a great multitude of people. It will, therefore, be seen that in the Gospel of John we not only have a new element added to the general doctrine of the second coming of Christ, but we also have a more profoundly spiritual interpretation of that event than it is customary for some strong advocates of the second advent to welcome when they dilate upon this doctrine.

A Double Resurrection

When we proceed to examine the writings of Paul we find that the resurrection of the body is by him identified with the spiritual resurrection through obedience to Christ. The aspiration of the great apostle is, "If by any means I may attain unto the resurrection from the dead."[49] This is to be wrought through a personal identity of experience with Christ in suffering and death. The result of this will

[48] Matthew 16. 28. [49] Philippians 3. 11.

be a marvelous transformation. "For our citizenship is in heaven; whence also we wait for a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: who shall fashion anew the body of our humiliation, *that it may be* conformed to the body of his glory, according to the working whereby he is able even to subject all things unto himself.[50]

The process of that wonderful transformation Paul has recorded in words of immortal beauty: "Behold, I tell you a mystery: we all shall not sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. But when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory."[51]

The order of the resurrection in Paul's thought gives precedence to those who are asleep in Christ. "But we would not have you ignorant, brethren, concerning them that fall asleep; that ye sorrow not, even as the rest,

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[50] Philippians 3. 20, 21. See Burial Service, Discipline of Methodist Episcopal Church.

[51] 1 Corinthians 15. 51–54.

who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also that are fallen asleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we that are alive, that are left unto the coming of the Lord, shall in no wise precede them that are fallen asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven, with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first; then we that are alive, that are left, shall together with them be caught up in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore, comfort one another with these words."[52] "But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; then they that are Christ's, at his coming."[53]

Climax of the Advent

Thus the purpose of Christ's second coming is truly to finish his mediatorial ministry on the earth, and to establish before all intelligences his claims to universal sovereignty. His enemies shall be mute in their own defense, though they mourn when he comes to judgment.[54] "Then *cometh* the end, when he shall

[52] 1 Thessalonians 4. 13–18.

[53] 1 Corinthians 15. 23.

[54] Matthew 24. 30; Revelation 1. 7.

deliver up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have abolished all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign, till he hath put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be abolished is death."[55]

With the abolition of death, life in its highest possibilities will move on forever. The invisible world will become visible. The celestial will absorb and transfigure the terrestrial. What science and philosophy have vaguely dreamed to be true will be proved fact—beyond the material universe is the real universe, of which the physical order known to man is but the symbol. At Christ's second coming the invisible will break in upon the visible, the eternal will envelop the temporal. No mightier overthrow of the materialism which counts at highest worth the things of time and sense could be imagined.

The mastery of matter by mind, of flesh by spirit, so frequently foreshadowed in the earthly achievements of man, will be established with unquestionable emphasis when Christ comes again. In glorified bodies we shall live, indifferent to external difficulties, since these will have disappeared. Hunger and thirst, pain and anxiety, suffering and

[55] 1 Corinthians 15. 24–26.

death, now so powerful to disturb the mind and quench the better moods of the spirit, will have no existence.

With the supremacy of good over evil, at the coming of Christ, the last influence hostile to man's peace will have been banished forever. The purpose for which man was created will be realized. Body and spirit will alike be free from taint, and the divine image will shine in undimmed splendor. The new heaven and the new earth will mean not merely a physical transformation of the universe, but the regeneration of human society. The dream of universal peace and righteousness will be fulfilled. The knowledge of the Lord will fill the whole earth as the waters cover the sea. Into this climax of human history we shall enter with joy if we love our Lord's appearing. "But thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Wherefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not vain in the Lord."[56]

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[56] 1 Corinthians 15. 57, 58.

CHAPTER V

WHEN IS CHRIST COMING AGAIN?

THE noblest example of Gothic architecture in Europe is the Cathedral of Cologne, its great towers lifting their pinnacles more than five hundred feet into the sky, its vaulted ceiling springing two hundred feet from the pavement, its spacious interior adorned with columns and arches of massive strength and beauty. Its foundations were laid in the thirteenth century, and its architect went the way of all flesh. Generation after generation took up his plans and slowly carried them forward. Occasionally for long intervals the work languished, and parts of the structure were even allowed to decay. But a hundred years ago eagerness to finish the cathedral revived, funds were gathered from many sources, enthusiasm for the task captivated all Germany, and in 1880, six hundred years after the architect had dreamed this symphony in stone, the world looked upon its completed splendor, and praised the genius which had conceived it.

Nineteen hundred years ago, in a prophetic

vision of unmatched sublimity, Jesus outlined his conception of a world-religion, and of a church in which to embody it. Then he went away to heaven, committing to his disciples the task of making his dream come true, and promising to return some day to receive and reward the results of their fidelity. Generation after generation has toiled at the plan of the Master, and through every century devout souls have wondered when the glorious edifice would be finished, and at what hour they might expect their Lord.

The earliest mention of what on the surface appears to be a point of time concerning the return of our Lord is found in connection with the commission Christ gave to his apostles, when he bestowed upon them "authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all manner of disease and all manner of sickness."[1] He then sent them out "to the lost sheep of the house of Israel," and warned them that they would meet with persecution, and would "be hated of all men" for his name's sake, but assured them, "He that endureth to the end, the same shall be saved," a promise we find in Christ's apocalyptic discourse expressed in the same words;[2] a fact which lends

[1] See Matthew 10. 1–23.

[2] Matthew 24. 13; Mark 13. 13.

probability to the suggestion that in the record of that address there is not merely what Jesus said on the occasion of its delivery, but also much which had been said by him at other times. Shall we say that some things he uttered then were transferred to other portions of the narrative from that discourse, or that many pregnant sayings of our Lord were repeated frequently in order that they might not be forgotten?

The Time of Christ's Second Coming

In any case, after Jesus had predicted the trials which the apostles would confront, he gave them this advice and encouragement: "But when they persecute you in this city, flee into the next: for verily I say unto you, Ye shall not have gone through the cities of Israel, till the Son of man be come."[3]

What can the phrase "till the Son of man be come" mean? As far back as Chrysostom it was regarded as equivalent to, "till help shall come from the Son of man," but this is altogether too vague. Others have interpreted it to signify "till Christ shall be triumphant," as in his resurrection he did become victorious. Some have asserted that the words refer to the coming of the Son of man in the outpour-

[3] Matthew 10. 23.

ing of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. Others have said the prophecy was fulfilled through the destruction of Jerusalem. But it is possible to conceive of this promise as literally applied to the second advent, if we admit the likelihood that some Jews will still be hostile to Christ when he returns to judge the living and the dead. In such an interpretation there is nothing to intimate a definite hour for this event.

In his apocalyptic discourse Jesus plainly intimated that his coming to the final judgment of the world would be delayed. This did not impress his first disciples, who were eager that he should return in their lifetime, and it does not sufficiently impress those who in this age are anxious that he should return. But, in the light of nearly two thousand years of history, we ought to be able to understand these intimations.

In the parable of the virgins it is stated, "While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept."[4] In the illustration of the evil servant, that recreant one says, "My lord tarrieth."[5] In the parable of the talents it is said, "After a long time the lord of those servants cometh."[6] These sentences would have no meaning if they were not taken to signify

[4] Matthew 25. 5. [5] Matthew 24. 48. [6] Matthew 25. 19.

that Christ was not going to return at once. The emphasis in each of these parables is laid on the certainty that he will come and the uncertainty of the time of his return.

Gospel Preached Everywhere First

What the time of that delay was to cover Jesus explicitly told. He said that it would stretch over the period needed to proclaim his gospel to the ends of the earth. "And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world for a testimony unto all the nations; and then shall the end come."[7] Those who believe that Jesus will return in the immediate future have an answer to this. They say that in some scriptural sense, unknown to us, the gospel has been preached to all nations. They even quote Paul as saying that the gospel had in his day already been preached everywhere.[8] It is not the same thing, however, to speak of the gospel as having been launched out generally upon the world and to speak of it as having been preached everywhere among men. There are even those who say that, astonishing and incredible as it may seem, the early disciples of our Lord did actually during their lifetime preach the gospel to every nation.

[7] Matthew 24. 14.

[8] Colossians 1. 23.

Some who are not looking for Christ's early return, but who believe that all prophecies respecting the second advent were fulfilled at the destruction of Jerusalem, and that no other coming of Christ in bodily presence is therefore to be expected, reduce this saying of Jesus to mean that it was only necessary that the habitable world known to the disciples of Jesus should receive the gospel before his return. They point to the fact that this is what "the world" evidently signified to Luke, who in describing the throng which witnessed the marvels of Pentecost says, "Now there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, from every nation under heaven;"[9] and then proceeds to give a very limited list of peoples and kindreds. Other passages of similar import are quoted in support of this view. Perhaps these would be convincing if in this instance we were not dealing with the mind of Christ, rather than with the minds of ordinary men. Our Lord was not fettered by a popular notion. In his vision "the world" was far vaster than the civilized lands with which his disciples were dimly acquainted. Furthermore, he saw not merely the age in which his hearers were living, but the ages which stretched away into the indefinite future, with the innumerable

[9] Acts 2. 5; see also verses 9, 11.

multitudes of men and women who should occupy them.

It is manifestly wrong to affirm that Christ's command to evangelize the world has been literally fulfilled, while in immense areas of heathen blackness there are but little pin-prick holes through which the light of the gospel may shine with feeble ray. With six hundred and seventy-five millions of pagans now living on the earth who have never so much as heard the name of Jesus Christ, it is an offense against reason and a deceitful handling of the word of God to declare that the gospel has been preached as a witness unto all nations. Doubtless there are a few persons here and there in every national division of the earth who have heard the gospel; but it is a foolish thing to say that this is what Christ meant by his prediction; when we know that he said definitely: "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature." This involves something more than merely getting the gospel over the edge of a nation here and there. Those people who are so indolent and so impatient, that they want Christ to come back as soon as possible to do the work which has been committed to them, ought to remember that he has declared he will not do this until they have accomplished their whole duty

by spreading the knowledge of his gospel universally through the earth.

Time Unknown to Jesus When on Earth

The one statement above all others which should make the cock-sure heralds of Christ's near approach hesitate with some degree of modesty is this: "Of that day and hour knoweth no one, not even the angels of heaven, neither the Son, but the Father only."[10] If Jesus did not know in the days of his flesh, then we cannot be convinced that any man knows, for we have never met any man with more spiritual intelligence than Jesus. It may seem startling to read that Christ did not know the hour of his own return to the earth, but it is another proof that when he came to this world and took on himself the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of man, he did indeed empty himself of the prerogatives and privileges of deity, as Paul said.[11] We know that, as a child, he increased in wisdom and stature; that is, as he grew in years and in bodily development, so he grew in knowledge and wisdom and was subject to the same law of development as that to which we are subordinated.[12] This means that there were

[10] Matthew 24. 36; Mark 13. 32.

[11] Philippians 2. 7.

[12] Luke 2. 52.

times when he knew more than at other times. He was limited and conditioned by his human life.

We have sure evidence of this in the expressions he made of surprise. Sometimes he declared his astonishment at the faith of individuals, and at other times he marveled at their unbelief.[13] Now, the element of surprise would have been impossible to him had he known in advance everything about human beings and the conditions of life about him. In the days of his flesh, according to his own testimony and other scriptures, he voluntarily limited himself.

It will be remembered that he said he had the ability to summon twelve legions of angels to deliver him from his enemies, but he refrained from doing this. Perhaps also he could have known the time of his second coming had he desired it. But he had emptied himself of the privileges and prerogatives of the Godhead, and he voluntarily refused to inquire of the Father when this time should be. That limitation of himself is as sublime as any other element of self-restraint which we find in his great renunciation for the sins of the world. It puts him into sympathy and fellowship with all men, on a common level of priv-

[13] Matthew 8. 10; Mark 6. 6.

ilege. He did not know. The angels did not know. It behooves us to be a little chary about boasting that the times and seasons are known to us.

An Interval to be Used

Of course Christ knows now when he will return to the earth. Having gone back to the heavenly glory at the time of his ascension, he resumed all that of which he had emptied himself at the time of his incarnation. He is on the throne of eternity. We preach that he is God.[14] But though he is omniscient, and could reveal the exact hour of his return to the earth, he has not done so. The wisdom of this reticence is perfectly obvious even when measured by human standards. It is not difficult to imagine the results which would follow the definite fixing of the time of his return, because we have illustrations of the consequences which have come to men and society when, at different periods of the world's history, devout but misguided persons have set the hour for Christ's return. Then great laxity of devotion to duty was manifest; the necessary activities of life were interrupted, and great evils followed, which were increased by the disappointment experienced after the

[14] John 1. 1; Colossians 2. 9.

fixed period had passed, and it became perfectly clear that Christ was not yet to return.

Paul found it necessary to correct the impression apparently made on the minds of the Thessalonians by his first epistle that Christ's return would be almost immediately. He wrote to them: "Now we beseech you, brethren, touching the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our gathering together unto him; to the end that ye be not quickly shaken from your mind, nor yet be troubled, either by spirit, or by word, or by epistle as from us, as that the day of the Lord is just at hand; let no man beguile you in any wise; for *it will not be,* except the falling away come first, and the man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition."[15] If there are predicted events yet to occur, it is puerile to say that Christ may come any minute.

Nevertheless, "in an hour that ye think not the Son of man cometh," said Jesus;[16] for which reason we are enjoined, "Let your loins be girded about, and your lamps burning; and be ye yourselves like unto men looking for their lord, when he shall return from the marriage feast; that, when he cometh and knock-

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[15] 2 Thessalonians 2. 1-3. Concerning "the man of sin" see pages 175-181.

[16] Matthew 24. 44.

eth, they may straightway open unto him."[17] He will return soon.

"For yet a very little while,
He that cometh shall come, and shall not tarry."[18]

"I come quickly: hold fast that which thou hast, that no one take thy crown."[19] Perhaps Peter's words are the best explanation to be given to the apparent incongruity of saying that Christ will shortly return, and yet putting up milestones which must be passed before he can come: "But forget not this one thing, beloved, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day."[20]

Peter addressing the throng on the day of Pentecost exhorts them to repent and be converted, that "there may come seasons of refreshing from the presence of the Lord; and that he may send the Christ who hath been appointed for you, *even* Jesus: whom the heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, whereof God spake by the mouth of his holy prophets that have been from of old."[21] In Luke's narrative of Christ's apocalyptic discourse he says that Jerusalem shall be trodden under foot "until the times

[17] Luke 12. 35, 36.
[18] Hebrews 10. 37.
[19] Revelation 3. 11.
[20] 2 Peter 3. 8; Psalm 90. 4.
[21] Acts 3. 19–21.

of the Gentiles be fulfilled," an expression which, taken in conjunction with many other passages of Scripture, would seem to imply a considerable period during which the nations outside of Israel would have the opportunity of receiving the gospel of Christ. Through that era we are still passing. When it will end depends on the zeal and wisdom with which Christian people push the project of world evangelism which Jesus entailed upon them.

Those who attempt to diagram the ages, basing their calculations on the prophecies of Daniel, as though these made a calendar of the future, are engaged in a foolish piece of business. From this seer there is a quotation in the apocalyptic discourse of Jesus, who, therefore, must have been thoroughly acquainted with his writings, as doubtless were also the disciples. Had our Lord interpreted Daniel as some adventists do to-day, he would not have said that he did not know the day or the hour of his return. What we know is, that Christ will come again, that he will come at a time when the world will be going on in its customary procedure, and when all the appearances will be against the supposition that he is coming. For that hour we are to await the decision of God.

The Sum of the Matter

Having put together all that is essential in the recorded sayings of Jesus about his second coming, we may now ask: What is the necessary conclusion from this examination of Christ's personal teachings, apart from all human speculations and philosophic theories?

1. We cannot accept the view held by some expositors, both ancient and modern, that the doctrine of the second advent is only a deposit or residuum of Judaism, which in its latest development before the birth of Christ was luxuriant in what is called apocalyptic literature; that the notion of Christ's second coming was useful in sustaining the early Christians through their terrible persecutions, though it was a conception certain to give way to purer and more spiritual ideals after time had been given for reflection and experience had corrected the mistakes of the earlier period. That would be equivalent to saying that Jesus had made an error, or that the New Testament writers had ignorantly misrepresented Christ, or had willfully deceived us concerning what he actually said. From these alternatives we turn away with contempt.

2. We cannot avoid the conviction that the words of Jesus were open to different inter-

pretations at different times, and that this is accountable in large measure for the confusion into which the minds of his disciples were thrown. Sometimes our Lord spoke of his coming again as though it were to occur during the lifetime of those who were listening to him. Sometimes, on the contrary, it is said that his second coming is at a distance. There are also parables connected with Christ's teaching of his second coming which would seem to affirm that he will come quickly and suddenly, and still others which apparently declare that he will delay his coming. After his resurrection he says to the disciples who are anxious to know whether the kingdom will be restored to Israel, "It is not for you to know times or seasons,"[22] thus hinting that the period preceding his second coming is an indefinitely long one.

3. We have seen how the disciples did confuse the destruction of Jerusalem with what Christ called the end of the age. May they not also have mixed the final coming of our Lord to judgment with other comings of the Son of man such as are expressed in the Gospel of John? For example, Jesus did come again at his resurrection, and in a visible, bodily form, and in a real sense his spiritual

[22] Acts 1. 7.

kingdom was then in operation on the earth. Again, the Son of man surely did come on the day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit fell upon the disciples and the Church of Christ was inaugurated with great power. Such comings of the Lord make it possible for us to understand the words of Jesus when he says, "This generation shall not pass away, till all these things be accomplished."[23] "There are some of them that stand here, who shall in no wise taste of death till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom."[24] But such comings of Christ, as we have already said, are not to be identified with his final coming to judgment.

4. For the same reasons we must distinguish from his final advent to judgment other alleged comings of the Lord: (1) Some say his second coming occurred at the destruction of Jerusalem. In a sense this is true, but it was not the final coming to judge the whole earth, and it was not a visible, bodily coming. (2) Some say that he is always coming in the providential occurrences of history. He came in the German Reformation, in the French Revolution, in the Wesleyan Revival, in the emancipation of the slaves in the American Civil War,

[23] Matthew 24. 34.

[24] Matthew 16. 28; see also Mark 9. 1; Luke 9. 27.

in the modern revivals of religion, in the present European conflict, and in other great epochal events. In a sense this is true, but not one of these events can be called a personal coming of Christ to judgment which he so plainly predicted. (3) Some say that Christ is always coming at the death of each individual, and that such parables as the virgins can mean only this. There is doubtless an element of truth in such interpretations, for at death there is an end of all probation and an entrance into judgment. The results of character are actually made up, and the ultimate fate of the soul has been determined. Nevertheless, this is not to be identified with a personal, visible return of Christ such as he predicted.

5. All that Jesus is recorded as saying may be harmonized with what is brought out most clearly in the Gospel of John. It is evident that by him the coming of the Lord was considered under a twofold aspect. It could be thought of as a dispensation rather than a single event. It began with the spiritual advent of Christ at his resurrection, when with great power he returned to assume a spiritual sovereignty over the sons of men, to continue his power through all the history of the Christian Church until the end of the present age,

when, the spiritual work of salvation having been accomplished and the kingdoms of this world having become the kingdoms of our Lord, he shall come to receive his inheritance in a bodily, visible form, to raise the dead, to judge the world, and to begin his eternal and undisputable reign.

With that conception of the second advent all that Jesus predicted is in full accord. In other words, the second coming of Christ will be at the climax of Christian development and not at the collapse of the Christian Church. His second coming is the goal of human history and not the gulf into which all human development is buried. His gospel is to be preached everywhere. He will give every man a fair chance, and when the probation is ended for individuals, and when his church, under his personal guidance, has carried the world forward to righteousness as far as it can be brought, and civilization has attained its fullest fruition, he will return to claim his own. That is, the exceedingly old order will have come to an end, and the glorified heavenly state will begin.

Jesus uttered some things which confirm this teaching by what a plain mind, undisturbed by vagaries and preconceptions, ought to regard as unmistakable proofs. In spite of

the fact that his coming at the climax will find many people unprepared and everything going along as before, and in spite of the fact that alarming potents will accompany the advent, Jesus taught that this approach would be gradual and that the progress of his kingdom upon the earth would be continuous. In his parable of the leaven,[25] his parable of the mustard seed in the same connection, his parable of the growing corn,[26] the kingdom of God is described as subject to the law of growth. It would seem certain that Jesus recognized the necessity of a long preparatory process. He was aware that his kingdom would be established through a natural course of human development. It would involve the evangelization of the various races.[27] All this would require a long process, but it would be a course of increase in the earth. Jesus saw with such vividness that what was far off seemed near to him. His disciples were greatly impressed by his words. For this reason they very naturally fell into the mistake of supposing that his second advent was near. But he stated distinctly that when he came back the

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[25] Matthew 13. 31–33. For discussion of this parable see pages 186-189.

[26] Mark 4. 26–29.

[27] Matthew 24. 14; 26. 13; Mark 13. 10; Luke 21. 24.

ancient order would come to an end, and the glorified heavenly state of the saved would begin. That old order shows no evidence of being brought to a speedy termination. The second advent of our Lord is still an event of the indefinite future.

CHAPTER VI

WHAT IS CHRIST DOING NOW?

When the Emperor Julian, surnamed the Apostate, made an expedition against the Persians, one of his followers asked a Christian of Antioch, "What is the carpenter's son doing now?" The humble Christian said, "The Maker of the world, whom you call the carpenter's son, is employed in making a coffin for the emperor." A few days later the announcement was made in Antioch that Julian was dead, having been mortally wounded in a battle with the Persians.

The same question asked by that contemptuous disbeliever of the olden time is frequently asked in our day, and we repeat it for ourselves, not in the spirit of the enemy, but of the lover. We also give ourselves an answer totally different from that uttered by the Christian at Antioch. Our reply does not indicate vengeance from our Master, who, when James and John wished to punish the Samaritans for their inhospitality to him, "turned, and rebuked them."[1] Jesus so uniformly declared that his mission among men

[1] Luke 9. 55.

was to save, not to destroy, their lives, that every rhetorical description of Christ's triumphs in terms of martial conquest is an offense. Religious teachers who embellish their oratory with similes of butchery to make more vivid the victories of our Lord, doubtless thinking thus to glorify his name, are far from the line of propriety, and should remember that Jesus himself said, "The Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost."[2]

It is altogether likely that as soon as their Master had departed from them the disciples began to ask one another, "What is Christ doing now?" It is said in the record: "He led them out until *they were* over against Bethany: and he lifted up his hands, and blessed them. And it came to pass, while he blessed them, he parted from them, and was carried up into heaven."[3] The narrative is filled in by the same author in another place where he says, "And while they were looking stedfastly into heaven as he went, behold two men stood by them in white apparel; who also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye looking into heaven? this Jesus, who was received up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye beheld him going into heaven."[4] We complete the story by turning back again to

[2] Luke 19. 10. [3] Luke 24. 50, 51. [4] Acts 1. 10, 11.

Luke's Gospel and reading: "And they worshiped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy: and were continually in the temple, blessing God."[5] Yet they were doubtless asking one another, from time to time, "What is Christ doing now?"

If His Return Be Not Soon

We know that the apostles were expecting their Master to return very soon, notwithstanding the cautions against such a mistake which he had given them, as has been shown in preceding pages of this work. He had warned them against too much curiosity about times and seasons. He had commanded them to tarry in the city until they were "clothed with power from on high."[6]

He had told them they were to be his "witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judæa and Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth."[7] Instead of seeing in these instructions clear suggestions that he would not return immediately, they kept watching for him every day. They thought of him as just withdrawn temporarily behind that cloud which had "received him out of their sight,"[8] from which he would speedily issue to bring in his

[5] Luke 24. 52, 53.
[6] Luke 24. 49.
[7] Acts 1. 8.
[8] Acts 1. 9.

eternal and universal sovereignty over the earth. To heaven he had gone, from heaven he would come, and that right early. In one respect they were more intelligent than many modern Christians—they believed heaven to be near at hand. But as the days moved on, and Christ did not return, they could not help asking, "What is he doing now?"

Pentecost came with its mysterious baptism of power, enabling them to rejoice in the fulfillment of a promise which they had not till then understood, and confirming them in the belief that all other promises of their Master would have equal verification. Persecutions poured upon them, and they suffered many cruel hardships, but they had received one answer to their question—"What is Christ doing now?" He had said the Spirit of truth would be sent by him and his Father, and his word had been kept. They were to receive another glorious proof that Christ was in action for their sakes somewhere. When Stephen was about to sink into sleep, pounded to death by the stones flung at him by his persecutors, he suddenly cried, "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God."[9] Christ rising as if to extend help to his fallen saint is the in-

[9] Acts 7. 56.

spiring picture the Christians of the day carried in their hearts to assure them that the Son of man had not deserted them till the hour of his return. In heaven he still kept royal guardianship over them.

After nineteen centuries we are frequently putting to ourselves the query which at the first troubled the apostles, "What is Christ doing now?" We have all the reasons for answering satisfactorily that question which the first Christians had, and we have them reenforced by ages of history and vast volumes of Christian experience.

Christ is Reigning in Heaven

Like the disciples of old, we first think of Christ as in the celestial world, and turning to the Scriptures for a response to our inquiry, we find it plainly written that he is reigning in heaven. He made declaration to this effect when he quoted Psalm 110, and applied the passage to himself,

> "The Lord said unto my Lord,
> Sit thou on my right hand,
> Till I put thine enemies underneath thy feet."[10]

This statement so impressed Peter's mind that on the day of Pentecost he quoted it, and explained the descent of the Holy Spirit on the

[10] Matthew 22. 44.

ground that Christ from his throne was manifesting his power. "Being therefore by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he hath poured forth this, which ye see and hear."[11] In the Epistle to the Hebrews we have the same idea expressed concerning Christ: "Who being the effulgence of his glory, and the very image of his substance, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had made purification of sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high."[12] Jesus "is on the right hand of God, having gone into heaven; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him."[13] He promises to share his regal power with his saints. "He that overcometh, I will give to him to sit down with me in my throne, as I also overcame, and sat down with my Father in his throne."[14] This inspiring conception of Christ reigning in heaven has been the inspiration of many of our noblest hymns. We express it devoutly in the prayers we offer. It has been the faith of the church through all the centuries.

But we feel that pictures of thrones and scepters are not to be taken literally. We

[11] Acts 2. 33.
[12] Hebrews 1. 3.
[13] 1 Peter 3. 22.
[14] Revelation 3. 21.

have in them symbols to represent vividly the authority of Christ which is spiritually exercised in heaven. We cannot properly think of the government in the celestial world as obtained by force. It is a sovereignty of love. The authority of Christ as king is spiritual. His subjects yield loving obedience to his known will. The cross is his scepter. His power is that of sublime character and loving fellowship. When he was here among men he reigned wherever he was, in this profound sense. On the fishing boat from which he preached and wherein he showed his mastery over the deep; in the humble dwelling where he healed the sick and spoke tender words of consolation; among the multitude when he fed them; at the Pharisee's table when he dined there; at the grave of Lazarus when he spoke deathless words of comfort—in fact, everywhere Christ was king, not by physical force, but by compulsion of character, by the energy of love.

When he comes again it will be in the same fashion that his power will be exerted. What a travesty on his kingdom it is to suppose that it will be like that of an Alexander, or a Xerxes, or any other mighty murderer on the earth! What a caricature of him it is to suppose that he will lead armies of invincible

soldiers who will wreak vengeance upon the enemies of their king and divide the spoils of conquest with those who have bowed in allegiance to him.

Christ is Interceding in Heaven

Turning to the Bible again, we find that Christ is interceding for mankind in the heavenly world. He is not only a king, but a priest. He was also a prophet, but when he left the earth his prophetic mission had been accomplished. But he remained in his kingly office and he continues in his priestly office. On this position the Epistle to the Hebrews has much to say: "Having then a great high priest, who hath passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we have not a high priest that cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but one that hath been in all points tempted like *as we are, yet* without sin. Let us therefore draw near with boldness unto the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy, and may find grace to help *us* in time of need."[15] "Wherefore also he is able to save to the uttermost them that draw near unto God through him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them."[16]

[15] Hebrews 4. 14–16.

[16] Hebrews 7. 25.

Of course we should not think of a temple in heaven with Christ officiating as the priest after the manner of the Jewish priests of the old dispensation, just as we cannot properly think of a literal throne on which our Lord is sitting wielding a scepter of authority. But, by his very presence and character, Christ is representing us in heaven. John has a different figure for the same great idea. He thinks of a pleader or an attorney, and says: "My little children, these things write I unto you that ye may not sin. And if any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: and he is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for the whole world."[17] We are not to think of a courtroom with a judge on the bench and Christ pleading before him in the style of the modern hall of justice. But Christ in his own person, by his very presence in heaven, and through his character as the atoning sacrifice for the sin of mankind, is in a sublime reality interceding for men. There is an oft-quoted story of classic literature concerning Æschylus, who was condemned to die by the Athenians. At the moment of his sentence by the judges his brother, Amyntas, came in. He had been brave in the service of his

[17] 1 John 2. 1, 2.

country. He simply lifted the stump of an arm, from which the hand had been severed in battle, and said not a word. But the judges were so impressed by this mute but powerful appeal that they immediately pardoned Æschylus. So our Lord's presence in heaven is a guarantee of our salvation, because his sacrificial life and death eternally carry divine compassion to the children of men. An old hymn graphically expresses this profound truth:

> Five bleeding wounds he bears,
> Received on Calvary;
> They pour effectual prayers,
> They strongly plead for me;
> "Forgive him, O forgive," they cry,
> "Nor let that ransomed sinner die."

Christ is Preparing Homes in Heaven

We also learn from the Scriptures that Christ is in heaven preparing homes for those who love him. We cannot tell all that is involved in this remarkable statement. But Jesus plainly said to his disciples, and, therefore, to all who in future generations acknowledge his lordship: "In my Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I come again, and will receive you unto myself; that

where I am, *there* ye may be also."[18] He is our forerunner. He makes heaven real to us by the fact that he has gone thither. If he had not ascended to the Majesty on high, we might live in doubt concerning that unseen world. Even his resurrection from the dead was not alone sufficient to confirm men in their hope of a future life. But when he passed into the heavens he made vivid and actual that invisible world. What he is doing there by way of preparation for those who love him may be merely a matter of speculation, and, as the Scriptures are silent on this question, our conjectures are but idle and unprofitable. But that he is indeed fitting up a place for us which will be glorious on many accounts, but chiefly because of his own presence there, we cannot doubt. In our deeper spiritual moods we feel that this heaven of which he is the chief glory is very near to us.

When the saintly Payson was nearing the end of his life he wrote to his sister: "I might date this letter from the land of Beulah, of which I have been some weeks a happy inhabitant. The celestial city is full in view. Its glories beam upon me; its breezes fan me; its odors are wafted to me; its sounds strike upon my ears, and its spirit is breathed into my

[18] John 14. 2, 3.

heart. Nothing separates me from it but the river of death, which now appears but an insignificant rill that may be crossed at a single step. The Sun of Righteousness has been gradually drawing nearer and nearer, appearing larger and brighter as he approached, and now he fills the whole hemisphere, pouring forth a flood of glory, in which I seem to float like an insect in the beams of the sun, exulting, yet almost trembling, while I gaze upon this excessive brightness, and wondering with unutterable wonder why God should design thus to shine upon a sinful worm."

What Christ is doing in heaven is only a part of his activity. He is also present on the earth. He is busy in both the visible and the invisible world. Just as he was leaving his disciples, he said to them: "All authority hath been given unto me in heaven and on earth. Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I commanded you: and lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world."[19]

These are very wonderful words, on which Christian faith has hung with confidence for

[19] Matthew 28. 18–20.

these many centuries. Now, if Christ is here on the earth in any real sense, we ought to know it. The evidences should be found in what he is doing. It is exceedingly comforting to find that proofs of his presence abound on every hand.

Christ is in His Own World

He is in current life, as he has been in the history of the past. Jean Paul Richter spoke for us all when he affirmed that "the life of Christ concerns him who, being the holiest among the mighty, and the mightiest among the holy, lifted with his pierced hands empires off their hinges, and turned the stream of centuries out of its channel, and still governs the ages."

It is curious that men of the world who have made no great claim to piety should realize this miracle of Christ's presence even more clearly than many who are sincere worshipers of our Lord. Ernest Renan refers to Jesus as "this sublime person, who each day still presides over the destinies of the world," and addresses to him this apostrophe: "A thousand times more alive, a thousand times more beloved, since thy death than during thy passage here below, thou shalt become the cornerstone of humanity so entirely, that to tear thy

name from this world would be to rend it to its foundations."

Napoleon Bonaparte on Saint Helena expressed a like conviction: "Can you conceive of Cæsar as the eternal emperor of the Roman Senate, and from the depth of his mausoleum governing the empire, watching over the destinies of Rome? Such is the history of the invasion and conquest of the world by Christianity; such is the power of the God of the Christian; and such is the perpetual miracle of this progress of the faith and of the government of his church."

Every Christian should be able to realize this by an act of personal faith in the Son of God, with whom it is his privilege to have constant spiritual fellowship. He should be conscious of it in the sacraments and observances of the church, particularly in the holy communion, in which Christ has promised to manifest himself to all who partake of his body and blood in the mystical sense. They should see this truth in the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, the Comforter whom Christ promised to send, and who, according to his word, should represent him. "I will not leave you desolate: I come unto you."[20] We must not forget that the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Christ. Chris-

[20] John 14. 18.

tians ought also to be sensible of Christ's presence in the world through his activity in the church, which is called his body. The providential history of Christianity should convince every reader of the inspiring record that our Lord is exercising oversight of all his people.

In Scottish story there is a tale of MacGregor, a Highland chieftain who fell wounded by two balls. His clan wavered and would have been swept away by the enemy, but when the stricken leader noticed this he raised himself upon his elbow with all his remaining strength, and while the blood was gushing from his wounds he cried: "I am not dead, my children. I am looking to see you do your duty." The drooping courage of his men was aroused, they once more resisted the onslaught of their foes and prevailed against them. The Christian ought to be able to hear a voice like this from his Master, and be sustained by the certainty that his Lord is beholding his every act. John pictures him in the Apocalypse as saying, "I was dead, and behold, I am alive for evermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades."[21]

Christ is Seeking the Lost

He is here seeking to save men by his tender approach to their souls. Two vivid scenes

[21] Revelation 1. 18.

present themselves to our imagination. The first is laid in Eden amid the most entrancing environment. It is an earthly paradise, with a heavenly atmosphere. In this habitation dwell those created in the image of God who are to be the progenitors of the human race. About them reigns a golden era of peace, and in their hearts are innocency and happiness. But as we look a somber change occurs. Sin enters the fair abode, and with it the grim specter of death. Life is tainted, and beauty begins to decay. Darkness settles over the earth. But in the gloom a footstep is heard, and God, who is treading the leafy path, sends out his voice upon the awful silence, bringing terror to hearts filled with a sense of guilt, though his accents are tender and gracious as he says, "Where art thou, O man, where art thou?"[22] Drawn from their covert whither they have retired to hide themselves from the voice of the Lord, they are hurried out of paradise into a world of sorrow and struggle.

Over against this scene place another. It is laid, not in a luxurious paradise, but in a world of disorder and confusion. Rank error grows everywhere. Fields of blood stretch here and there. The earth is a wilderness and darkness covers its face. But as we look a

[22] See Genesis 3. 9.

bright form emerges from the gloom. Wherever he goes a flood of glory follows. It is the incarnate Son of God treading the stony paths of earth. Sin-stricken men lift up their weary hearts to hear his tender voice as it steals out over the dark waste and says, "The Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost."[23] It is Christ walking through the centuries, seeking the fallen, crying in anguish of spirit to all wanderers, "Where art thou, O man, where art thou?"

This is the office that Jesus is steadily performing upon the earth, and it is incredible that any who believe in his power to save and in his everlasting compassion for the sinner should doubt that he is among men, "not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many."[24]

Christ Is Saving Life

He is here to transform character. We know how he bound himself to this task when he was among us in the flesh. This is his work now as then, and the marvels which he is performing surpass any other wonders which have astonished the world. He is taking the broken and dirt-covered fragments of humanity which he can pick up anywhere, and he is

[23] Luke 19. 10.

[24] Matthew 20. 28.

rearing a temple, whose spires and pinnacles shall pierce the sky, whose magnificence shall command the admiration of the universe, and whose aisles and vaulted ceilings shall resound with the sublimest music ever produced on earth or in heaven. He enters the haunt of vice and calls into eternal life the desperate drunkard. He invades the purlieus of the city, and wins to purity the shameless harlot. These are but types of his manifold power to transfigure human life. The records of modern work for the perishing abound in exhibitions of his saving grace. Thus his presence will be forever proved until the world shall be brought to his feet, not by the compulsion of force, but by the irresistible might of love.

He reigns in heaven and on the earth.

He intercedes in heaven and with men on the earth.

He prepares homes for men in heaven above.

He makes heaven for them on the earth beneath.

His power astonishes. His wisdom amazes. His loves conquers. To him we yield our lives.

CHAPTER VII

WHAT SHALL WE DO TILL CHRIST'S RETURN?

A FEW years ago a strange thing happened to a lake fifty miles long and ten miles wide in the heart of Mexico. One morning the people living in a little settlement on the shore were alarmed to see an immense whirlpool far out upon the surface of the water. It was accompanied by a dull rumbling noise. Many sailing boats were upon the lake at the time, and a large number of them were sucked down by the maelstrom. The struggles of the persons overtaken by this calamity were terrible to behold, but nothing could be done in their behalf. In twenty minutes all was over. The explanation of this calamity was indicated by the fact that after the disturbance had passed the surface of the lake had subsided several feet, and streams of petroleum were noticed running along the edge of the shore, thus leading to the opinion that the bottom of the lake had suddenly sunk, causing the destructive whirlpool.

It is customary to make such events illustrate the suddenness and unexpectedness with

which death may come to anyone. Nothing is plainer to the mind of the observer than the certainty that life on earth will some day cease for each inhabitant, and the uncertainty of the time when this end will be reached. These facts are analogous to the certainty that the Son of man will return and the uncertainty of the time at which he will come back. The illustrations which Jesus used to impress these facts are most striking. Some persons insist on applying those parables to the event of death. They can be so used, but to make this their exclusive meaning is to tear them violently from their connection.

In spite of the fact that Christ said the day and the hour of his return were not known even to himself,[1] and that he warned his disciples to be ready, "for in an hour that ye think not the Son of man cometh,"[2] some of his words are used to prove that it is possible to fix approximately the time of his return. This is done under the influence of certain statements of our Lord concerning tokens which might be relied upon to signify the approach of his second advent. Yet he qualified these declarations to such an extent that he evidently wished them to be used with great care, and even warned his apostles against the

[1] Matthew 24. 36. [2] Matthew 24. 44.

danger of being mistaken.[3] Though he emphasized the necessity of being constantly prepared for his return, he repeatedly said that the time of his coming again was indefinite. Yet he exhorts them to watch, "And what I say unto you I say unto all, Watch."[4]

Why does Jesus make this exhortation so strong? First, that he may keep alive this expectation of his return entirely apart from the time when it is to occur. He wishes his disciples never to have absent from their thought the fact that he is coming back. This event must be in the forefront of all their activities. They must remember that judgment is to be pronounced; that this life has to do with the next; that accounts will inevitably be made up. But does not the uncertainty of the time of Christ's return empty his words of the force which otherwise they would possess? This cannot be the case if we remember all his recorded reasons for urging watchfulness. It is an important thing to keep our Lord's coming before our minds, and the very uncertainty of the time of his coming serves to emphasize the certainty of the event. The supreme emphasis is on the coming to judgment, and not on the time of the event. "Watch," for it is a crisis which all must some time meet.

[3] Matthew 24. 4, 23.

[4] Mark 13. 37.

The Command to Watch

There is no illusion about this. Jesus is not striving to excite men to watchfulness under false pretenses. He is the most candid teacher the world has known. He says in his apocalyptic discourse, "When ye see all these things, know ye that he is nigh, *even* at the doors."[5] The apostle James has repeated this caution. He says, "The judge standeth before the doors."[6] This is a fact of perpetual experience. All through the centuries Christ has been standing at the door. In the fullness of time he will turn the knob, lift the latch, and come in to final judgment. No one knows when this will occur, but the signs before the siege of Jerusalem are types of the signs before his second advent. Yet Jesus repeatedly said, "Let no man deceive you." In other words, he would have them be cautious about the signs, and remember the things that are to come to pass before his return. How long after these signs have appeared he will come no one knows. It is enough to say that these things must occur first. After that, not immediately, will come the end. But, meanwhile, the church must watch and pray, because the Judge standeth at the door.

But millions have died in the constant

[5] Matthew 24. 33; see also Mark 13. 29. [6] James 5. 9.

expectation of his coming, and he has not returned. Certainly, and millions more will die before he comes in the historic sense in which we are now using that phrase. But the Judge is always standing at the door. When death thrusts us out of that door he is there to meet us. If we have a conscious spiritual fellowship with him, that meeting will be one of exceeding great joy. Thenceforth, under better conditions, the fellowship we have been enjoying will be continued forever. If, as we pass out of the door, we are conscious of a spiritual separation from him, that meeting will be an unhappy one, for it will mean a continuance of that separation. The final judgment will yet awake the world. When He who is standing at the door does come to the world, those who were in conscious fellowship with him will be raised to glorious and unbroken life with him and with the holy of all the ages. But those who were evil and knew themselves to be separated from him will be raised to condemnation and continued separation from him. For he said, "All that are in the tombs shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of judgment."[7] Now the state of each

[7] John 5. 28, 29.

of these classes was fixed at death. The good never become bad from the time they close their eyes in death until the hour of their resurrection, and the bad never become good during that interval. If ten thousand years are yet to be rolled away before Christ returns to final judgment, the condition of men at the time of their death will not be altered in the slightest degree when the Lord comes to separate the faithful from the faithless. They will all receive judgment of life or death according to their spiritual condition at the moment of their decease. In this sense it is appropriate to say that the Son of man comes to everyone when his earthly probation is ended, but this does not exclude the final judgment. Christ is coming in due time to bring to a termination the age during which his gospel has been preached.

Time Only One Element in Watching

The command to watch has a variety of meanings. There can be no doubt that the time idea is pushed to the front with such a purpose as we have sought to outline. This can be the only meaning of the parable of the householder and the thief. "Watch therefore: for ye know not on what day your Lord cometh. But know this, that if the master

of the house had known in what watch the thief was coming, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken through. Therefore be ye also ready; for in an hour that ye think not the Son of man cometh."[8]

It is possible to make too much of the point made in this parable, as though it were the only element in Christ's exhortation to watchfulness. We cannot escape the feeling that this is sometimes done by evangelists who make dramatic use of this exhortation when appealing to impenitent sinners. The uncertainty of life is a fact with which people are so fully acquainted that it has lost its impressiveness. The evangelist finds that to bear down upon the certainty of Christ's return and the uncertainty of the moment when he may come is to produce an alarm in the spirits of some which the mere uncertainty of life cannot awaken. The second advent of Christ is a concrete thing which excites the imagination of the hearer; but if the latter is a reflecting person, he will know that there is something more striking and impressive than this. It is the fact that the omniscient Christ is always present and forever observing his life. The Scriptures go much farther than do the evangelists. They

[8] Matthew 24. 42–44.

do not depend on the second coming of Christ as the sharpest incentive to penitence. They make it plain that he who delays to make his peace with God because he thinks Christ might not come in the next hour or the next year, is pursuing a foolish and suicidal policy. Gambling on the chances of Christ's return is exceedingly dangerous, since in a spiritual sense Christ is already here. He sees the guilty soul of the sinner. He is his present judge. His breath is on the sinner's cheek. His hand is on his pulse. The sinner has not the guarantee of an hour. If he ceases to breathe at any minute, there is absolutely an end of his opportunity for salvation. If Christ comes to-morrow, or a thousand years from now, the result will be the same. The situation cannot be changed. There is no safe moment but now.

Christ is Also Watching

It is this spiritual presence of Christ that needs greater emphasis in our day, and it is important that the ground of the righteous life should be more solid than the mere dread lest Christ may come back to find the sinner in a hopeless state. It has been said by an evangelist who makes much of the speedy return of Christ as a motive for repentance and faith,

"Knowing that the bank examiner may drop in at any moment keeps many a cashier from being dishonest." That is not true. Honesty does not consist in merely refraining from dishonest acts, but in having a spirit which would scorn dishonesty. If the cashier is only outwardly honest, because he fears the sudden appearance of the bank examiner, he may really be a thief at heart.

The fact of Christ's spiritual presence must also be emphasized in the thought of the true believer. In many of the parables used by our Lord to illustrate the suddenness and unexpectedness of his return he speaks of the possibility of long delay, as has been shown in preceding pages. Christians must remember that, however tardy his return may seem to be, he is constantly in his own world doing his own work among the children of men. This fact we have emphasized in a former chapter. What is of great importance is that those who believe and love our Lord should not become weary because he does not visibly manifest himself to them. The impatience of the Christian is in some respects as evil as the recklessness of the sinner. It is well for us to remember other words of Christ, as well as those which specifically refer to his second coming. He said, "Lo, I am with you always, even unto

the end of the world."[9] He comforted his disciples with the promise: "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them."[10] Yet some Christians speak as though they thought of Christ as afar off, almost out of reach: they must wait for him to return in order to obtain help of him in their struggle to overcome the world. Bishop Taylor said, "I know Jesus Christ better than I know anyone else in the world." He felt that he could have perpetual comradeship with him. It is a species of infidelity to doubt this possibility. It shows a deplorable lack of faith. It is virtually to deny that the church has had Christ's personal direction through the centuries. It is to affirm that in all the time yet to come before his visible return the church will be without his guidance. It is to assert that Christ cannot be victorious by the exercise of his spiritual presence and power. It is to say that he is helpless and hopeless in the contest for this world until he comes back to the earth in a body which can be seen and handled. It is putting an abridgment to the omnipotence of Christ such as one would think no true believer in his deity would for a moment entertain. Let it not be forgotten how slowly and method-

[9] Matthew 28. 20.

[10] Matthew 18. 20.

ically God works in the processes of the physical world, and this impatience about the return of Christ will seem childish. "Be patient therefore, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient over it, until it receive the early and latter rain. Be ye also patient; establish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord is at hand."[11]

Watchfulness and Personal Religion

Making all allowance for the urgency of perpetual watchfulness, lest the Lord come upon us when we are unaware, it must be apparent from the considerations just set forth that many persons have placed the emphasis of our Lord's admonitions on the wrong thing. Time has occupied the whole thought of many, whereas conduct is the real matter upon which our Lord laid the most stress. The question is not, When will our Lord return? but How shall I behave until he does return? Conduct, and not time, is the pivot upon which all Christ's exhortations turned.

By comparison of our Lord's words with the exhortations of his apostles we learn that watchfulness means not merely fixing one's

[11] James 5. 7, 8.

eye upon the possibility of Christ's return at any time, but also, and more specifically, attending to one's personal, spiritual condition. In the parable of the virgins,[12] we have an illustration of the necessity of keeping the heart with all diligence and seeing that by prayer and watchfulness the inward grace of a holy life is maintained. We are not to let the oil of grace become exhausted. We are not to permit our spiritual emotions to die. We must obey the command of Christ, "Let your loins be girded about, and your lamps burning; and be ye yourselves like unto men looking for their lord, when he shall return from the marriage feast; that, when he cometh and knocketh, they may straightway open unto him. Blessed are those servants, whom the lord when he cometh shall find watching: verily I say unto you, that he shall gird himself, and make them sit down to meat, and shall come and serve them. And if he shall come in the second watch, and if in the third, and find *them* so, blessed are those *servants*."[13]

This implies perfect faith in Christ, who must be trusted and loved precisely as though he were in bodily presence among us. "Whom not having seen ye love; on whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice greatly

[12] Matthew 25. 1–13. [13] Luke 12. 35–38.

with joy unspeakable and full of glory: receiving the end of your faith *even* the salvation of *your* souls."[14]

This cultivation of the inner life must not be left to private devotion alone. We are urged to "watch and pray."[15] But this must include public worship. "Not forsaking our own assembling together, as the custom of some is, but exhorting *one another;* and so much the more, as ye see the day drawing nigh."[16]

All this will induce in the true Christian sobriety of conduct, and seriousness of attention to the details of a Christian character. Our Lord gave very clear intimation of this. "But take heed to yourselves, lest haply your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that day come on you suddenly as a snare; for *so* shall it come upon all them that dwell on the face of all the earth. But watch ye at every season, making supplication, that ye may prevail to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man."[17] One of the men who heard Christ's apocalyptic discourse carried out this exhortation as follows: "Wherefore girding up the loins of your

[14] 1 Peter 1. 8, 9.
[15] Mark 13. 33.
[16] Hebrews 10. 25.
[17] Luke 21. 34-36.

mind, be sober and set your hope perfectly on the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ."[18] "But inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings, rejoice; that at the revelation of his glory also ye may rejoice with exceeding joy."[19]

We can see from these considerations a deep significance in the exhortations of the Apocalypse. "Nevertheless that which ye have, hold fast till I come."[20] "Be thou watchful, and establish the things that remain, which were ready to die: for I have found no works of thine perfected before my God. Remember therefore how thou hast received and didst hear; and keep *it,* and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee."[21] "I come quickly, hold fast that which thou hast, that no one take thy crown."[22] "Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame."[23] In these and many other similar injunctions by Christ and his apostles we perceive that watchfulness, in view of our Lord's second coming, bears upon the personal spiritual life

[18] 1 Peter 1. 13.
[19] 1 Peter 4. 13.
[20] Revelation 2. 25.
[21] Revelation 3. 2, 3.
[22] Revelation 3. 11.
[23] Revelation 16. 15.

of the believer who is looking for his Saviour's return. He is not only to watch for his Lord, but to watch himself, lest he be found wanting in the grace of a godly life even while he is talking of his Master's coming, and feeding his imagination on the bright hope of his appearing.

Watch Your Business

But watchfulness also means fidelity to trust, first among those who are charged with high responsibilities, such as the apostles. To this effect speaks one of the parables given by our Lord in his apocalyptic discourse. "*It is* as *when* a man, sojourning in another country, having left his house, and given authority to his servants, to each one his work, commanded also the porter to watch. Watch therefore: for ye know not when the lord of the house cometh, whether at even, or at midnight, or at cock-crowing, or in the morning; lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping. And what I say unto you I say unto all, Watch."[24] With the same intention is the parable of the faithful and faithless headservant. "Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom his lord hath set over his household, to give them their food in due season? Blessed is

[24] Mark 13. 34–37.

that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing. Verily I say unto you, that he will set him over all that he hath."[25] The apostle Peter has taken up this idea in the following passage: "The elders therefore among you I exhort, who am a fellow elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, who am also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: Tend the flock of God which is among you, exercising the oversight, not of constraint, but willingly, according to *the will of* God; nor yet for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; neither as lording it over the charge allotted to you, but making yourselves ensamples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd shall be manifested, ye shall receive the crown of glory that fadeth not away."[26]

The penalty which will fall upon the unfaithful servant is appalling. "But if that evil servant shall say in his heart, My lord tarrieth; and shall begin to beat his fellow servants, and shall eat and drink with the drunken; the lord of that servant shall come in a day when he expecteth not, and in an hour when he knoweth not, and shall cut him asunder, and appoint his portion with the hypocrites: there shall be the weeping and the

[25] Matthew 24. 45–47.
[26] 1 Peter 5. 1–4.

gnashing of teeth."[27] It is a tragic fact of history that unfaithful shepherds of the flock of Christ have been guilty of the very neglect which is pictured in this parable. This was the case in those dark centuries when the Roman priesthood forsook their spiritual obligations and allowed the people to starve for the bread of life. A similar neglect of sacred duty was instanced in the conditions which made necessary the great evangelical revival in England during the eighteenth century.

The longer "my lord tarrieth" the greater is the temptation to fall into this sin. Hence the necessity of keeping in mind that, while Christ did not say he was coming back very soon, he did reiterate beyond the possibility of anyone misunderstanding him that he is coming back some time, and he did make it plain that until he does come back in the historic sense he will continue his spiritual presence in the world and be very observant of the conduct of his servants.

Work While You Watch

The same fidelity to trust is enforced upon all Christ's disciples as an imperative obligation. In the parable of the talents[28] we have

[27] Matthew 24. 48–51.

[28] Matthew 25. 14–30.

this lesson taught in unmistakable terms. It is said that after a long time the master returned to see what his stewards had done with their opportunities and to confer everlasting benefits upon those who had been faithful, and to administer punishment to those who had been neglectful. It is sometimes possible for people to fasten their minds on the fact of Christ's second coming in such a way as to exclude from their thought the necessity of faithfulness in the performance of their duties while they are upon the earth. This is an evil which befell the Thessalonians. They had become so convinced that Christ would come back quickly that they fell into easy and unconcerned idleness, and this resulted in their dropping into evil ways, so that Paul was compelled to write them very sharply, saying, "For even when we were with you, this we commanded you. If any will not work, neither let him eat. For we hear of some that walk among you disorderly, that work not at all, but are busybodies. Now them that are such we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread. But ye, brethren, be not weary in well-doing."[29] Those lax and irritating persons have their successors in our day. Many

[29] 2 Thessalonians 3. 10–13.

good persons who are looking for the early return of our Lord keep this injunction, but there are others who neglect it. The temptation to do this is very subtle. Against it we should seek to guard ourselves with great care. The meaning of Christ's teaching is that while we wait we must work.

The parable of the talents is centered on the truth that every man has some ability, and that each will be judged according to the use which he has made of this stock in trade. There is such a thing as taking one's responsibility too lightly. This was the case with the unwise virgins in Christ's great parable. They are not to be thought of as evil people who were shut out because their characters were bad, but as people who did not realize the importance of everlastingly keeping themselves in readiness. They took their functions at too low a valuation. There is danger that by fixing his thought upon the glorious fact of Christ's return, and by assuming that it may come during his lifetime, the Christian may think there is no urgent need to work against the evils which are about him in the world, and thus fail to keep the real spirit of Christ's exhortation to be watchful. We have those among us who say that the church has nothing to do with reforms in society. Its

only business is to preach the gospel, exhibit holy and unspotted lives, and thus bear witness to the grace of God as revealed through Jesus Christ. They announce that to work for the destruction of the liquor traffic, the suppression of the social evil, the removal of political corruption, the cleansing of the slums, the improvement of the industrial situation, or any other philanthropic undertaking, is but a waste of time and energy, and an interference with the supreme duty of the church. They say the iniquities which vex society can never be cured till Christ returns to do this in person, and ask why Christians should dabble unprofitably with these matters in view of the fact that Christ will soon come back and summarily dispose of everything hostile to his kingdom. The parable of the talents should be a sufficient corrective for such folly, if there were no other.

Watch With Your Lord

As our Lord knelt in the garden of Gethsemane he was stricken with the sense of loneliness because his disciples could not enter into the shadow of his trial. On rising from his knees to rejoin them he discovered they were asleep, and gently rebuked them in words addressed to Peter: "Could ye not watch with

me one hour?"[30] One can imagine him now observing the sluggish way in which many Christians await his return, and asking with pathetic solicitude the same question. He has a mighty task on his hands. It is such a burden as only the Son of God can bear. He calls for the sympathetic fellowship of his church. He says to all ease-taking waiters, "Could ye not watch with me one hour?" Watchfulness does not only mean waiting for him to come back, but also engaging in the work on which his heart is set.

On the other hand, it is possible to think of our service as too hard. The man who had but one talent gave up his task of making it develop into something worth while and hid it away in the earth. So people who are looking for the return of our Lord may consider their abilities as so small that nothing can be added to the influence of the gospel by their activity. These are to remember that Christ wants them also to watch with him during this little hour, and to carry forward to the utmost of their ability the task which he has committed to them. Until Christ comes back we are to watch if there is any loyalty in us. That is so clearly put, in such a variety of words, that we cannot doubt it. But we are to watch not

[30] Matthew 26. 40.

as men who are looking for the coming of the morning, but as persons upon whom the day has already dawned, in which they are to put off the slumber of the night and put on the energy of the day. Our Lord said: "We must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work."[31] The day is here. It is not to be filled with dawdling and dreaming, but with daring and doing.

[31] John 9. 4.

CHAPTER VIII

IS THE WORLD GROWING BETTER?

We are told that it makes no difference what we may think is the correct answer to this question; that the whole matter is determined by what the Bible says about it. We admit that we ought to search the Scriptures for light on this subject; but we also offer a gentle protest against the suggestion that human reason, which is a gift of God, cannot safely be used in the effort to ascertain from observation and experience the facts of life which bear on the question.

It would seem perfectly clear that we do not need to go to the Bible, which was finished many centuries ago, to learn what is the condition of society to-day, and that if we should do this, nothing would be added to our knowledge. We may find in the Scriptures much, on the other hand, to enlighten us on the social, political, moral, and spiritual conditions which prevailed in ancient times. So shall we likewise find in many other books of history valuable aids to an understanding of the world's state in earlier epochs. By comparing the con-

ditions of our times with those existing one century or ten centuries ago, we should be able to declare whether the character of society at present is better or worse than at some previous period, just as we can tell by consulting our memories or the weather records whether the physical conditions surrounding us to-day are more comfortable or less agreeable than those of ten days ago. In the same way it is within our ability to determine whether the moral conditions in the United States or Europe, Asia and Africa are improving or declining.

Facts Must Fit the Bible

The only necessity is that, first, we shall be acquainted with enough of the world to be able to base our conclusions on adequate information, and, second, that we shall have sufficient judgment or common sense to form a correct opinion from the facts brought to our attention. It is just here that those who say we must consult the Bible to find out the truth respecting the moral and spiritual conditions of the world point the finger of condemnation at us, and say that we cannot have intelligence enough to know the world, and even if we had the widest possible acquaintance with the populations of the earth, we should still be incom-

petent to determine whether they were better or worse than their ancestors. Only God is wise enough to understand the exact situation, and he has given to men through inspired writings the final test by which they may know whether the world is advancing or retrograding.

This position would be troublesome if it were not true that the actual facts in God's world must correspond with the actual statements in God's word with regard to the world. Surely, mere human conjectures or denials will not amount to anything. Facts are facts, and they must be harmonized with themselves, and not with the notions of men respecting them. When we have the facts we should adhere to them, no matter how far they take us. We feel certain that Jesus and his apostles did not say anything contrary to the facts in their day, and that they did not proclaim anything with regard to the future which will contradict the facts as they successively occur in the history of mankind. It is affirmed by some that Christ and his apostles said the world was very evil, and that it would get worse instead of better. No one denies that Christ and his apostles said that the world in their day was very evil. It did not require any inspiration to make that declaration. Everybody could

see that it was a fact. It may be said with equal accuracy that the world of our day is very evil, and it requires no divine revelation to make that fact clear to the intelligence of everyone. But Christ and his apostles did not say that the world would get worse and worse until it became so thoroughly steeped in sin that there would be nothing left but to wreck it and begin over again. The truth is they said something quite different, and the facts of history and current life are in entire agreement with them. These assertions we shall now prove.

The Last of the Apostles First

Let us inquire what the New Testament says with regard to the future of this world, and then put alongside of these declarations the facts of human development as they are plainly exposed to our view. The apostles may properly be considered first, because historically speaking they are nearer to us in point of time than is Jesus. They did not begin to write until Christ had gone from the earth about thirty years, and they continued to write until at least fifty years had passed; so that in these New Testament writers we have testimony which covers a half century beyond the time when Jesus made his procla-

mations. We are thus provided with the means of gauging the drift of Christian feeling and how far it agreed with what our Lord had previously said.

The latest of these writers was the apostle John, who said, "Little children, it is the last hour: and as ye heard that antichrist cometh, even now have there arisen many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last hour."[1] The phrases "the last hour," "the last days," "the last time," as used by John and other New Testament writers, refer to the end of the age, which they evidently believed to be very near, and at which they expected the return of Christ. John apparently thought this event would occur during his lifetime. "The last hour" is the close of the gospel dispensation, which began with the establishment of the Christian Church, and will end with Christ's final appearance to judge the world. "The last days" are bounded by a constantly widening horizon, but they lie within the range of the writer's vision. When John used the phrase he meant the short period which he believed still remained before the manifesting of Christ at the last day. We feel ourselves to be in the last times, as compared with the early ages which have fled away, but when we

[1] 1 John 2. 18.

think of the progress which Christ's kingdom has yet to make we sometimes feel that we are in the first times. It is to be observed that John saw many antichrists in his day, and that he felt their presence indicated that the age was swiftly coming to an end. Those who see in our day a similar number of antichrists should exercise restraint in proclaiming on this ground the speedy termination of this dispensation, remembering how many centuries have fled away since John wrote.

The World as John Saw It

The conditions which the apostles saw around them, together with their expectation that Christ would very soon return, colored their language whenever they spoke of the age in which they were living, and must always be taken into account in attempting to explain what they meant when they described the trend of the future, as it appeared to them. John wrote a sentence which is the main reliance of those who insist that the world is growing worse: "We know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in the evil one."[2] This is interpreted to mean that, since human society as a whole is within the embrace of the devil, it

[2] 1 John 5. 19.

is quite irrational to suppose that it can ever be improved.

Much unprofitable argument of this sort would be prevented by remembering that the word "world" has four different meanings in the New Testament, and that wherever it is used the context will tell the earnest student of the Bible which is intended. (1) The world means the universe, the order of nature, the created world. It is in this sense used by Christ in his great high-priestly prayer when he says, "Father, I desire that they also whom thou hast given me be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world"[3] (2) The earth, the space inhabited by men. This is the sense in which Jesus used it when he said, "And I am no more in the world, and these are in the world, and I come to thee."[4] (3) The world of humanity, mankind universally. It is in this sense the word is used when John says, "And he is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for the whole world."[5] (4) The world of mankind as alienated from God, the unspiritual world which

[3] John 17. 24; see also Matthew 25. 34.
[4] John 17. 11.
[5] 1 John 2. 2.

gets its inspiration from the devil and not from God. It is this world to which John refers when he says: "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the vainglory of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world."[6] This is the world that "lieth in the evil one." This is the world which is to be overcome, since it is always seeking to invade the believer's soul. "For whatsoever is begotten of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that hath overcome the world, *even* our faith. And who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?"[7] But the world of humanity is not to be overcome in any sense except that it is to be won to Christ. It is not to be hated and shunned, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have eternal life."[8] Apart from these distinctions in the scriptural use of the word "world," we should know that the whole world that lieth in the evil one could not actually

[6] 1 John 2. 15, 16.
[7] 1 John 5. 4, 5.
[8] John 3. 16.

mean the entire world of humanity. Otherwise it would include even those saints who hold that the world is growing worse.

But even that world of mankind alienated from God is the object of attack by the servants of Christ, with a view to winning to truth and righteousness as many of its inhabitants as possible. Either it is hoped that some success will attend this endeavor, or the church is shut up to a doctrine of predestination akin to a bald fatalism, such as has been almost universally repudiated by Christians on grounds of both reason and revelation. To assume that the world of willful sinners is imprisoned in such a way that it cannot be affected for good by the preaching of the gospel is practically to destroy the great incentive for attempting to rescue the unsaved populations of the earth.

Peter and Paul

It is not necessary to single out every text in the apostolic writings which by clever exegesis may be shown to bear on the belief of the first Christians regarding the character of their age and their expectations for the future. The judgment of the three leading apostles, as expressed in familiar passages, accurately represents the feeling of the primitive church as

a whole. Those who hold the criticisms which the apostles passed on their own times as predictions of the long future put much stress on the following: "Knowing this first, that in the last days mockers shall come with mockery, walking after their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for, from the day that the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation."[9] Here again we have mention of "the last days," and once more must remember the limitations of the phrase. Of course, there were scoffers in Peter's day who were saying, "Where are the signs of his coming?" And there are scoffers in our day who are making the same taunt, and there will be scoffers in the last day who doubtless will be hurling this irritating question. But this declaration of itself does not by any means indicate that the world as a whole will be scoffers, much less that the Christian Church will contain an immense body of nominal adherents who will be thrusting forward this insolent inquiry. It is a mere delirium of the imagination to assume that what is here designated as a special class will be, in fact, the majority of those who live in the world, or even an immense number, much less that these will be enrolled in the

[9] 2 Peter 3. 3, 4.

Church of Christ. Most Christian people in our day believe that Christ will come again, and as the church increases in magnitude this conviction will spread far and wide.

It is of the utmost interest to see what Paul says upon this matter; and, indeed, he says more than any other apostle. In 2 Corinthians, 4. 4, he declares that "the god of this world has blinded the minds" of those who do not believe, so that the gospel cannot penetrate their hearts. This is taken by some persons to mean that not only was the world incorrigible in Paul's day, but that it will continue to be so to the end, because it is absolutely incapable of perceiving the truth. This is another illustration of the fallacy so common among people of this type who make a general statement apply specifically to a theory which they have formed. It is plain to every man who reads without a preconception that what Paul has said is simply that if we have difficulty in explaining why the gospel is not successful with certain people, we may know the reason to be that they have become blinded by worldliness.

Iniquities of the Times

Three passages from Paul's letters to Timothy require scrutiny in this connection, since

they are used by many to buttress their theory that the world is inevitably growing worse. "But the Spirit saith expressly, that in later times some shall fall away from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of demons."[10] It is a queer temper which leads a man who reads the Bible honestly to take this passage as though it said that in the later days a majority of people would be of this sort, whereas all that Paul predicts is that *some* shall depart from the faith, which certainly does not indicate that a preponderant number, or even *many,* will do this. People have been guilty of such apostasies from the days of Christ until now, and it is presumed that such departures from the truth will occur through all the following centuries. But it is a manifest abuse of this passage to say that it indicates that the world will steadily grow worse and the church increasingly feeble.

"But know this, that in the last days grievous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, haughty, railers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, implacable, slanderers, without self-control, fierce, no lovers of good, traitors, headstrong, puffed up, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God;

[10] 1 Timothy 4. 1.

holding a form of godliness, but having denied the power thereof; from these also turn away."[11] Here we have again the phrase "in the last days," and must remember its limitations. The brief period in the apostle's mind has now run nineteen centuries. Paul saw the grievous conditions of his own day, and he predicted that they would continue. No one would be stupid enough to deny the likelihood of this. The human heart does not change. Individuals will be wicked to the end, but that does not mean either that individuals will be more wicked then than now, or that they will be relatively greater in number than now. If the people who use such a passage to prove that the world is retrograding would, in their interpretations, confine themselves to what is written instead of thrusting into the word of God what has no place therein, they would command larger respect.

"But evil men and impostors shall wax worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived."[12] Certainly! they always have grown worse and worse, and they always will. It is of the very essence of evil that it should increase in any human heart where it is permitted to reside. If a man continues to be evil, he will always grow worse and not better. Sin

[11] 2 Timothy 3. 1–5. [12] 2 Timothy 3. 13.

is forever progressing toward a climax. This is of its very nature. Evil men and seducers will never get better while they continue to be evil men and seducers. That is shown by experience every day, and we do not for a moment undertake to deny it or even to qualify it. But the passage does not say that the number of sinful men will increase relatively to the population of the world.

The Present and the Future

Paul's eye is upon his own age, which he expects will soon be terminated by the advent of Christ to judgment. He does not, in the passages just quoted, forecast the long future, in a section of which we are now living. Nevertheless, the evils he describes are recurrent in history. Again and again the picture he draws of his "last time" can be put down upon a place or a period and found exactly to fit it. This will ever be till the end comes. But it involves no proof that society will steadily deteriorate and the church grow feebler as the centuries melt away. There are strong reasons for believing that Paul took no such gloomy view of even the immediate future as some who quote him take of the present and the distant future. In illustration the following passage may be cited:

"For I would not, brethren, have you ignorant of this mystery, lest ye be wise in your own conceits, that a hardening in part hath befallen Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in; and so all Israel shall be saved: even as it is written,

There shall come out of Zion the Deliverer;
He shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob:
And this is my covenant unto them,
When I shall take away their sins."[13]

The Number of the Elect

This is one of the most significant prophecies in the New Testament. The phrase, "the fullness of the Gentiles," recalls the words of our Lord in his apocalyptic discourse, "until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled."[14] There time is the point of application, here it is the proportion of the Gentiles who are to be saved. The number is indefinite but preponderant. The apostle predicts the evangelization of the world outside of the Jewish nation before the conversion of the latter. Israel will be saved, but not until a vast majority of other people have been brought to Christ. Neither in the case of the Jews nor in that of the Gentiles does Paul say that everyone will be converted; but the words "fullness" and "all" certainly

[13] Romans 11. 25–27.

[14] Luke 21. 24.

point to an immense number of the elect, and hence to a comparatively small number of the reprobate.

Light is thus thrown upon another passage which is frequently misused to prove, first, that the only business of the church is to assemble the saints till the body of Christ is complete, and, second, that the elect saints will be but a handful in comparison with the lost. A church council is being held in Jerusalem over the question, To what extent ought Jewish ordinances to be binding on Christian converts? Peter tells his experience in preaching the gospel to Gentiles, and says that their conversion and receiving of the Holy Ghost satisfies him that God does not wish them to be loaded down with cumbersome and unprofitable ceremonies. Paul and Silas declare the miracles and wonders which they have witnessed among the Gentiles, and agree with the opinion of Peter. Then James says:

"Brethren, hearken unto me: Symeon hath rehearsed how first God visited the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name. And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written,

After these things I will return,
And I will build again the tabernacle of David,
which is fallen;

And I will build again the ruins thereof,
And I will set it up:
That the residue of men may seek after the Lord,
And all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called,
Saith the Lord, who maketh these things known from of old."[15]

It is here simply affirmed that God proposes, in view of Israel's rejection of the gospel, to extend his proffer of salvation to the pagan world, thus more than compensating for the temporary blindness of the Jews. James supports this declaration by a citation from the prophet Amos. Instead of seeing in this passage evidence that a meager company of the elect is to be separated from humanity, we should see in it a proof that Christ contemplates the gathering of a vast "people for his name."

In fact, it would not be difficult to show from the writings of Paul that he counted on a perpetual growth of the Christian propaganda until it issued in triumph over the world. His indefatigable labors through the Roman empire prove that he felt it his business to capture the civilization of his day for Christ. History records that he so far suc-

[15] Acts 15. 13–18.

ceeded that in the generations immediately following the heathen gods were hurled from their altars, and the Christian gospel became the prevailing faith of the empire.

The Man of Sin, the Son of Perdition

Against any suggestion that Paul was hopeful of continuous progress for the kingdom of God, under the present order of things, some will urge the following remarkable passage: "Now we beseech you, brethren, touching the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our gathering together unto him; to the end that ye be not quickly shaken from your mind, nor yet be troubled, either by spirit, or by word, or by epistle as from us, as that the day of the Lord is just at hand; let no man beguile you in any wise: for *it will not be,* except the falling away come first and the man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition, he that opposeth and exalteth himself against all that is called God or that is worshiped; so that he sitteth in the temple of God, setting himself forth as God. Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things? And now ye know that which restraineth, to the end that he may be revealed in his own season. For the mystery of lawlessness doth already work: only *there is* one that restraineth now, until

he be taken out of the way. And then shall be revealed the lawless one, whom the Lord Jesus shall slay with the breath of his mouth, and bring to nought by the manifestation of his coming; *even he,* whose coming is according to the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, and with all deceit of unrighteousness for them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God sendeth them a working of error, that they should believe a lie: that they all might be judged who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness."[16]

What does that passage mean? We might well wish that Paul had explained it to us. It would have saved the advocates of grotesque theories a great deal of brain weariness and prevented them from resorting to much artifice. It is evident that he had told the Thessalonians what enabled them to understand his words because he said, "Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things?"[17] He is simply reminding them of what he had previously said, the significance of which he believed was clear to them, though they had apparently overlooked it in their

[16] 2 Thessalonians 2. 1–12.
[17] 2 Thessalonians 2. 5.

eagerness to believe that Christ was almost immediately to return. Paul did not see fit to put down his explanation in writing. Evidently, the Holy Spirit did not inspire him to go on with an elaborate interpretation. It would look as though God did not care to make a complete revelation through Paul touching this matter. Perhaps it could not be appropriately committed to succeeding generations, since experience and history would finally be a perfect commentary on all prophecy. But the trouble with many theorists is that they cannot wait. They want to know immediately what this passage means, and since they have no sure revelation, they use their imaginations, and with remarkable agility. They find texts here and there which, like a child's building blocks, can be fitted into a structure that pleases them, though it may not be a fine piece of architecture. They look over history and find events which resemble items in this prophecy, and they are quite satisfied. But the next generation comes along and knocks over the pile just as a naughty boy might topple over the blocks of his brother, and then they begin all over again. So the man of sin in this passage has been applied to Nero, for the early Christians thought the picture exactly matched him. Later the idea gained credence

that it was the pope, and later the papacy as an institution. The Roman Communion retorted by applying it to Protestantism. Afterward the Christian world referred it to Napoleon Bonaparte, and there is no doubt that there are English, Belgians, French, Italians, and others who now think it is the German Kaiser. So the interpretation changes from age to age. The fact is that we do not know, though possibly some devout scholars may have made a close guess. It may require a good many thousands of years to fill out that picture and make it possible for future generations to understand what is involved in this apocalyptic passage. On the other hand, it may be that the thing so prophesied has been fulfilled, not completely and ultimately, but typically and partially. Perhaps the wretched times in the Middle Ages, when religion seemed to have become bankrupt, can be made to stand for the terrible evil herein predicted, though it may be but one in a series of such calamities. Perhaps every recurrence of frightful iniquity is in partial fulfillment, the present European war, for example, being in some of its aspects as hideous a piece of infernal wickedness as the world has ever known.

Remembering that the Jews in an earlier time had looked upon Antiochus Epiphanes as

the superlative personal manifestation of iniquity, and that Paul's mind was saturated with the apocalyptic literature of the Hebrews, both that of the Old Testament and that which was not admitted into the Bible; and remembering that prophetic language cannot be subjected to the same rhetorical laws which are necessarily applied to simpler and more precise forms of composition, we need not be concerned to make a close and accurate interpretation of this profoundly mysterious passage. Those who have attempted to do this, seeking to give each minute particular a precise and rigid meaning, have fallen into many foolish and unprofitable vagaries. The fundamental points in the prophecy are not hard to discern, and these are sufficient for all who are not carried away by a passion to solve puzzles or dispose of curiosities.

A Study in Proportions

That on the return of Christ evil will be exhibited in its most sinister forms, as is admitted elsewhere, is inevitable from the very nature of sin. Moreover, the contrast between the frightful apostasy of the few and the fidelity of the body of the earth's inhabitants who have been redeemed from wicked ways will be very startling. The dramatic elements of the comparison may lead

to the feeling that wickedness is more rampant than ever. It is also far from incredible that this iniquity of the minority will become in a sense incorporate, or federated under some unified leadership raising itself like a serpent to strike its fangs into its victim. It may follow the individual guidance of a conspicuous leader, the devil or one of his most capable representatives among men. It is natural that the final conflict between good and evil on this planet should be most terrible, that the assault of iniquity should be supremely venomous. But that does not necessarily mean that sinfulness will rally to its standards the majority of men then alive. Paul does not say anything of this sort in the passage under consideration. The worst men that ever cursed the earth will probably flourish when Christ comes back. But the best men and the most intelligent Christians ever known will also be alive at that time. The summits of both good and evil will tower aloft. That is in perfect harmony with the very constitution of things in this world of probation and discipline. What the power is which restrains the final outbreak of consummate iniquity until the time for it is ripe—whether the Holy Spirit, the church, the force of civilization, or what—we need not torture our

minds to ascertain. Is it not enough to know that it is held back, and that in due time, when "the lawless one" shall be revealed, the Lord Jesus shall slay him "with the breath of his mouth"?

There is nothing in the Scriptures which says that the whole world will be given over to the most virulent forms of iniquity, or that even a majority of the inhabitants of the globe will be characterized by such desperate sinfulness. Indeed, if we press the words of Jesus to the farthest point of literalness, we could not say that more than one half the population of the globe would be evil. "Then shall two men be in the field; one is taken, and one is left: two women *shall be* grinding at the mill; one is taken, and one is left."[18] Of course, the passage means nothing so mathematically exact as that. It signifies that, as society will be going on as usual, saints and sinners working together in their several occupations just as they do now, the coming of the Son of man will separate them regardless of the fellowship they may have on the earth. The fact that people are good will not prevent their being torn from their associates in business, saints being separated from sinners by an inevitable law of differentiation.

[18] Matthew 24. 40, 41.

What Did Jesus Think?

When we turn to consider the conditions at the end of the age, as they were intimated in our Lord's apocalyptic discourse, we are confronted by this picture: "And as *were* the days of Noah, so shall be the coming of the Son of man. For as in those days which were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, and they knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall be the coming of the Son of man."[19] This is more elaborately given by Luke in an earlier part of his record, and there includes a reference to the destruction of Sodom.[20] This prediction has been used to prove that our Lord taught that the world would be at its worst when he returned, whereas it has only to do with the fact that when he comes again the course of the world will be going on as usual, and does not indicate the actual spiritual conditions of the age. Even the most conservative millenarians admit this. One of these writers, commenting on this passage and giving it practically the interpretation here set forth, says: "Some would press these words further than this and make them teach that

[19] Matthew 24. 37–39. [20] Luke 17. 26–30.

as the days of Noah and Lot were peculiarly wicked days, so will the days of our Lord's return be days of extraordinary wickedness, but this is pressing the words which our Lord speaks here beyond their evident intent. Our Lord meant what he explicitly says, that men will be engaged in their usual occupations, little thinking the Lord is near, and in a moment he will come."[21] In Christ's great parable of the final judgment[22] the fact that the Son of man will separate the sheep from the goats impresses the writer just quoted as indicating that the world at the time of Christ's coming will be far from a state of salvation. We do not maintain that the whole world will be actually converted to Christ before his return, but we do contend that there is nothing in this passage of itself which necessarily contradicts such an opinion.

It simply does not say anything to show what the condition of people will be at the time of Christ's return. It is said that all nations are to be brought before him. Certainly, the multitudes who are dead are to be reckoned in the number, and we know that at that time the number of the dead will be incalculably larger than the number of those living at that mo-

[21] R. A. Torrey, The Return of the Lord Jesus, pp. 104, 105.
[22] Matthew 25. 31-46.

ment. There will have been sleeping in the dust the sheep and the goats to incomprehensible numbers to be judged in addition to all who are alive when he comes.

Parables of the Kingdom.

When Jesus spoke of the kingdom of God, as he did almost constantly, he sometimes had in mind a spiritual kingdom which was already operating in the world, and at other times his thought was dwelling upon the future triumphant manifestation of that kingdom after he had returned to judge the world. This anyone can see by reading the passages in the New Testament which record Christ's words about the Kingdom. Sometimes he is thinking of the quiet, unobtrusive, gradual entrance and spread of that kingdom in the hearts of believers and organized society. At other times he is forecasting the visible and glorious victory of that kingdom over all the sovereignties of the world. Now and then these conceptions, which are often separately regarded, are so blended together in his speech that it is difficult to say with certainty which is predominant in his thought at the moment. Yet it is never impossible to see what it is he expects the Kingdom to do among men, or how he believes it will operate in society.

There are a few of his parables which one would think to be unmistakable. But when a theory is to be advanced or supported the distortions to which these are subjected are amazing. In the parable of the tares and the wheat[23] we have a simple illustration of the wisdom of not attempting violently to root out the evils which spring up in the same soil in which righteousness is growing, and of the propriety of waiting until the end of the world for such adjustments as will then inevitably be made. This does not satisfy those who are sure the world is becoming worse, however, and they call attention to the fact that weeds grow faster than wheat, and that, therefore, our Lord meant that, as time went on, the field, which is the world, will be overrun with tares, which will be vastly in excess of the wheat when Christ comes back. If this interpretation were carried out to its logical conclusion, it would mean that in time the wheat would be entirely choked to death.

Now, it is a principle of sound interpretation that the parables of Christ in each instance are intended to illustrate only one point, and that single object always stands out so prominently that anyone of ordinary intelligence cannot miss it. Incidentally, other

[23] Matthew 13. 24–30.

points will also be illustrated if one cares to make the application, but the parable is not spoken for more than one purpose, and, if it does not contain its own key to interpretation, the meaning of the parable can be easily gathered from the context. In this case it is so clear that the abuse of it is unpardonable. Jesus virtually says, "Do not tear up the weeds at this time in the growing field, because you will hurt the wheat." Now, this is precisely what certain extremists wish to do. They would like to define the elect and stand aloof from those whom they think outside the pale. Our Lord is saying to them, as he said to his apostles: "You think you know who the good and the bad are. You believe you can point out the saints and those who are not saints. Be not so sure. Wait until the end of the world. If you rip up the weeds you will destroy the wheat."

The Leaven in the Lump

Another illustration of what Jesus evidently thought about the kingdom he had come into the world to establish is to be found in the parable of the leaven.[24] The plain interpretation of this parable lies immediately on the surface. The kingdom of heaven is like the

[24] Matthew 13. 33; see also Luke 13. 20, 21.

leaven, the fermentative qualities of which enable it to penetrate the batch of dough until the whole substance has been impregnated with its energy. But this is not a satisfactory explanation for some, who say that leaven is always corruption. Yeast contains the principle of decay. Therefore the use of the figure here means the introduction of influences which adulterate even the doctrine of grace and ultimately poison the world. The mystery of iniquity works, and will work, until the whole church has been permeated by it.

Of course the foundation of this theory is that leaven elsewhere in the Bible is used to represent a corrupting agency, as the leaven of the Pharisees, to which our Lord referred as hypocrisy.[25] Of course no biblical scholar denies that in the great majority of cases the word "leaven" is employed to typify that which is corrupting and deteriorating; but when Christ says that the kingdom of heaven is like leaven, we are sure he cannot mean that the kingdom is in process of decay. Once again let it be remembered that only one point in a parable is primarily intended to be illustrated. Here it is the energy of fermentation, and not the scientific explanation of fermentation, which is involved. The

[25] Luke 12. 1; see also 1 Corinthians 5. 7.

kingdom of heaven is like yeast in its power to extend its influence. It will pervade the whole body of society, and, if you were to carry Christ's figure out to its ultimate implication, it would mean that the kingdom of heaven will embrace the entire world of men and women if it be given time enough to accomplish its purpose.

The fact that a figure is used in one way almost exclusively is no reason for us to think that it may not be used in some other way. For example, one could speak of a rill at the top of a mountain, gathering power and volume from every little rivulet which flows into it as it proceeds down the mountainside, at length developing into a great stream, which finally becomes a broad river sweeping everything before it until it empties into the sea, as a type of the progressiveness of sin from small beginnings to great endings. We could say that no one can tell when he commences to do evil how vast the results will be. As life moves on, each day will add something to the volume of his iniquities until they become as great as the mighty river sweeping resistlessly to the ocean. On the other hand, the same figure could be employed to show the progressive development of a good life, which, beginning upon the mountain height in a little spring of

righteous endeavor and holy ambition, gathers strength as it goes, each new act of kindness contributing to its power, until at length it becomes a mighty river of beneficence, making the country through which it flows rich with flowers and fruits, and at last pouring its flood into the mighty ocean to sweeten and make wholesome the whole earth. So, while the leaven is ordinarily used to illustrate corrupting agencies, there is no restriction upon our Lord which compels him invariably to employ it in that way, and common sense shows that he did not so use it in this instance.

Other Misused Passages

When once the prejudice in behalf of a theory has been generated, there is no telling to what absurdities it will lead. For example, the parable of the mustard seed,[26] which so clearly uses the great productive principle of the earth, by which a great tree is evolved from the smallest of seeds, to typify the expansiveness of the kingdom of God, is mutilated by some theorists to mean "outward growth sheltering evil," the birds that lodge in the branches of the tree being figures of the iniquities which attach themselves even to the Christian Church. It would seem as though this

[26] Matthew 13. 31.

were so preposterous as only to require statement to carry its own refutation.

At the close of his parable of the unjust judge, our Lord asks: "Nevertheless, when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?"[27] The question is left unanswered by the Master. A similar silence would befit those who noisily proclaim that the rhetorical query of Jesus means that in this way he suggested there would be little or no faith among men when he should return. But the context shows that our Lord was in no such pessimistic mood when he uttered these words. He had been comparing the surrender to the widow's appeal which the unjust judge made under protest with the loving readiness of God to "avenge his elect, that cry to him day and night," saying that "he will avenge them speedily." Then he exclaims, "Nevertheless, when the Son of man cometh, shall he find" not "faith" in general, but "the faith," as the original text has it, "the faith" in particular which is denoted by the parable. The use of the definite article gives faith a specific application. It could be rendered "this faith," the faith which enabled the woman to persist in supplications for the redress of her grievance, the faith which will qualify men to con-

[27] Luke 18. 1–8.

tinue in prayer, when they are confronted by unhopeful conditions, the faith that believes God will make things right in due time. The Son of man, who "emptied himself" so that he could not tell when he would return, expresses no judgment in this instance concerning the probable situation when he should come again.

Jesus Never Despaired

We may say reverently that Jesus was the supreme optimist of his day. He never gave up any man but Judas Iscariot, who willfully tore himself away from the Master's fellowship. He never uttered a word which suggests that he did not expect to win his way. His aspirations and anticipations are easily gathered from the trend of his parables and the evident intention of his ministry. "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto myself,"[28] does not sound like anything but a comprehensive triumph for the cross, a victory to be gained by the power of his sacrificial life and death over the consciences and affections of men, and not by some sudden overwhelming display of material force such as misguided persons in our time are so confidently but unwisely proclaiming.

[28] John 12. 32; see also: Hebrews 2. 9, 10; Romans 5. 18; 1 Timothy 2. 6; Matthew 20. 28; Mark 10. 45.

The Early Church and the Second Coming

It was very natural that the early Christians should be deeply impressed by the evil of the world about them, since they were undertaking to oppose the traditions of the ages among their own people, and also among the pagans to whom they soon carried their gospel, awakening the sternest antagonism wherever they went. The expectation of a speedy return of our Lord to the earth was a comfort to them, particularly when they felt that he probably would come back within their own lifetime and overpower their enemies and establish his kingdom on the earth. We have seen how they interpreted the words of Jesus to mean these things. But in addition to this it was difficult for them to realize that Christ could triumph in the world unless he appeared in bodily presence and put himself into the midst of the conflict at the head of his own forces. A victory over the Roman empire, under the authority of which they were being relentlessly persecuted, seemed impossible to them without this advent of our Lord. But when within three centuries Christianity did actually bring Constantine the emperor to his knees, and Christianity became the official religion of the empire, the feeling that Christ's

bodily presence was indispensable to his triumph gradually lost its hold upon their hearts and minds. Thus the expectation of the early return of our Lord grew dim, until at length it became the habit of theologians to explain the prophecies relating to the second advent in accordance with the progressive development of history.

The Modern Parallel

A similar process is going on in our day. Many devout persons are disturbed over the gigantic task of the Christian Church, which they feel to be an impossible performance without the immediate bodily presence of Christ as leader. They observe that after nineteen centuries of effort the result produced is apparently not commensurate with the effort expended. They note that there are only about four hundred millions of nominal Christians in a population of more than one billion five hundred millions. Worse than that is the fact that of those who are nominal Christians, comparatively a small number are aggressive and deeply spiritual. They argue that at the rate Christianity is spreading through the earth it will not prevail for a very long time, if, indeed, it ever succeeds in establishing itself universally in the world. They, therefore, become

impatient and disconsolate over the situation. Their trouble is increased by the prevalence of wickedness even among those nations which have a theoretically Christian civilization. They see that no people on the earth has actually adopted Christianity as its basal system, and no government is officially regulated by Christian teachings. Even England and America are far from being Christianized in any official sense. Noting these things, they throw up their hands over an apparently unequal struggle and declare that only by the early return of Christ in bodily form can the fight against unrighteousness be won. Hence they comfort themselves with those scriptures which seem to predict the speedy second advent of our Lord, and say: "We need not trouble ourselves. Christ is soon coming, and he will set everything right."

Tokens of Advance

On the other hand, there are very many Christians who do not take a gloomy view of the situation. They call attention to the fact that Christianity for many centuries was in process of developing the doctrines of our religion, compacting its energies and organizing its forces. In this process mistakes were made. Worldliness crept in, "Churchianity"

took the place of Christianity. It was necessary that the church should be cleansed by many washings from the corruption which had invaded it. The German Reformation, of which Luther was the chief figure and which spread all over Europe in the sixteenth century, represents one of these cleansings. The revival of the eighteenth century in England and America was another. Similar renewals of the Christian spirit will be demanded as the years move on, but it is very apparent that the Christian movement is a rising tide. The breakers dash upon the shore, and the sea recedes until the next surge of water is flung upon the strand. But the watchful observer knows that after each of these refluent movements the tide reaches a higher point and ultimately will be at the flood.

As so long a time was required for getting Christianity into the only business for which it was designed, it need not awaken any surprise that it is but little more than a hundred years since the missionary idea really took hold of the church. The progress made in the last fifty years is amazingly greater than in any five hundred years preceding. Even now we seem to be on the verge of the sublimest missionary operations the world has ever known. The church is more influential in the

life of nations to-day than ever. The conquest of the Roman empire to Christianity was a kind of formal acquiescence in a system of religion which was apparently destined to bring everything to its standards. Now the acceptance of Christianity is not official, but individual. Multitudes of people, regardless of surrounding conditions, are earnestly surrendering their lives to Christ. They are permeating the whole body of mankind with distinctively Christian influences.

Even this absurd, unnecessary and wicked war in Europe is bringing millions to their knees who hitherto have been rationalists and infidels. Meanwhile nations find it necessary to apologize for war and to propitiate the sentiment of the world. The belligerents on either side of the present conflict are attempting to set themselves right before mankind. They feel they must answer at the bar of international moral sentiment. There was no need to do anything of this sort in past ages. War was then the natural and inevitable thing. No one felt it necessary to put a nation's cause before the world until our Revolutionary forefathers in their Declaration of Independence said that a decent respect for the opinions of mankind impelled them to declare the reasons of their separation from Great Britain. Their

motive in doing this was undoubtedly to get their principles afloat in the thought of the world. Now the smallest war among civilized nations must be defended on alleged grounds of moral necessity.

If we ask what has changed the sentiment of the world toward international questions, we can instantly reply that it is the progressive influence of the Christian religion. It is simply one of those tokens in current life that Christ's parable of the leaven is being fulfilled. The kingdom of heaven is proceeding to impregnate all society with its nutritive power. Christ's kingdom is spreading over the world, as he said it would.

For the benefit of those who lugubriously proclaim the steady deterioration of the church, it seems necessary to emphasize the fact that the church as a whole was never more earnest and never more single in its devotion than at the present moment. John Wesley, who has been proudly but incorrectly claimed by the group of millenarians who say the world and the church are on the downward track, published a sermon entitled On Former Times, in which he plainly indicates that though he may have expected our Lord's return before the climax of Christian conquest, he could not be regarded as at all in favor

of the doleful program which extremists have mapped out for the time immediately preceding our Lord's second advent. He reviews the career of the Christian Church from the century in which he lived backward to the beginnings of Christianity, and shows conclusively that, deplorable as were the conditions in Great Britain when the Methodist revival broke out, the church was even then better than it had ever been before. He shows that the preceding century was inferior in vital godliness; that the sixteenth century, despite its great reformation movements, was characterized by an outbreak of injustice and cruelty, so that in the religious wars of that time not less than forty millions of persons were slaughtered within the compass of forty years; that in the thousand years immediately preceding the sixteenth century there was little evidence of anything but the most unwholesome conditions in the Christian Church. Stepping back to the age of Constantine, he affirms that the union of church and state in the Roman empire was most unfortunate for the cause of religion, as the majority of historians have agreed. He shows that the church of the century before Constantine was characterized by great evils, and that abominations so prevailed that, as Cyprian

said, it was not strange that God poured out his fury by grievous persecutions. Tracing the church to the first century, even to the apostolic age, he cites the description John gives of the several churches which had been planted in Asia, and shows that they were no better than many congregations in Europe in his own day, and concludes: "Nay, forty or fifty years before that, within thirty years of the descent of the Holy Ghost, were there not such abominations in the church of Corinth, as were 'not even named among the heathens'? So early did the 'mystery of iniquity' begin to work in the Christian Church! So little reason have we to appeal to 'the former days,' as though they were 'better than these!' "[29]

The church of our times is not only the most aggressively evangelistic of any period in its history, but it more nearly approximates the fulfillment of Christ's prayer that all his disciples might be one than at any time since our Lord ascended from the slopes of Olivet. The movements for federation among all Protestant denominations, for Christian unity among Romanists, Greeks, and Protestants, for the organic unification of the various branches of the great denominations, all point to a spirit which has never been in the world since the

[29] Wesley's Sermons, vol. ii, pp. 360–362.

day when corruptions began to despoil the church of her real purpose. It is within the memory of middle-aged persons that denominations and sects formerly struggled against one another with disagreeable frankness. That day has passed, and, if there is any danger on the horizon with respect to the various denominational bodies, it is that in their eagerness for federation the distinctive peculiarities which have made each of them strong in the evangelization of the world may be entirely lost, to the temporary detriment of religion.

Evangelistic Progress

The current enthusiasm for foreign missions is another evidence of the increasing concern of Christian people for the fulfillment of Christ's ambitions with respect to the salvation of the world. The vast opportunities for Christian teaching among the non-Christian populations of the globe have called forth, through the Student Volunteer Movement and other agencies for the recruiting of missionary forces, the finest workers the world has ever known. The church is at the same time being awakened to see the necessity for greatly increased revenues for the carrying forward of the missionary propaganda. We appear to be on the verge of a great revival of financial

offerings on the part of Christian people who are increasingly realizing the obligations of Christian stewardship.

The work of the Young Men's Christian Association, the Young Women's Christian Association, and kindred organizations is developing and extending not only through nominally Christian nations, but in all parts of the world, so that the churches find themselves in vigorous competition with institutions which have sprung from their own loins, and the general stream of beneficence proceeding from these various sources is daily widening until it gives promise of speedily encompassing the world.

No one who has visited the colleges and universities of America can have failed to observe the increasing attention paid to religion, and the remarkable results in the conversion of students which are everywhere apparent. Even in those institutions which are founded by the state and which, therefore, cannot of themselves encourage any distinctively denominational activities, there are to be found college pastors representing various divisions of the Christian Church, and their number is constantly increasing.

All students of the intellectual temper of our times, as it is related to the spiritual life,

must observe the decline of the materialism which held so prominent a place in the thought of twenty-five years ago, and the consequent ascendency of spiritual and ideal conceptions as the ruling motives of modern thought. The old hard-and-fast mechanical ideas with regard to the origin of life and the philosophy of conduct have passed away, and we are seeing a glorious revival of spiritual idealism such as has not captivated the world for many decades.

There is an unmistakable improvement in the social conscience of the people as a whole. The increasing influence of moral considerations in public and private life is remarkable. This is so obvious that it is unnecessary to go into detail about it. Everyone is aware of the upward trend of modern thought with regard to social amelioration. In this connection the grasp of the doctrine of the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man is most striking. Religion is centering itself more and more in the twofold commandment which Jesus emphasized, and the age is requiring that all professions of faith in Christ shall justify themselves by the good works which tend to make the social conditions of our day more tolerable and helpful.

Everywhere reforms of a social, economic, industrial, and political nature are multiply-

ing to such an extent that they need but to be mentioned in order to be understood in their true relation to the general movement toward righteousness, which manifests itself in this day. Political reform, civic revolutions, humanitarian movements such as the effort to reduce and abolish child labor, the crusade for the destruction of the liquor oligarchy, the abolition of the opium traffic in China, the increased interest in the adjustment of the serious problems of marriage and divorce, the peace movements which, in spite of the European war, go on with accumulating strength, the vast amount of attention given to religious and moral questions in the periodical press and even in the ordinary daily newspapers—these, and a host of other things which any intelligent person can discern, are evidences of a growing concern for human welfare which aims at nothing less than that redemption of society which was so gloriously prophesied by the ancient Hebrew seers. The world is growing better by the hour.

CHAPTER IX

WHAT ABOUT THE MILLENNIUM?

JESUS did not speak of a millennium. Paul and the other apostles did not mention it. No ancient prophet uses the word. Indeed, it is nowhere to be found in the Bible. Strictly speaking, it simply means a period of a thousand years. There is one passage in the book of Revelation which describes the reign of Christ and the martyred saints for a thousand years, Satan having been bound for that period.[1] That is the sole foundation on which is built the doctrine of a millennium in the sense usually taught by millenarians. Other passages are brought to it from various parts of the Scriptures, because they are thought to confirm or explain it; but it is probable that without these few verses there would have been no such conception of a millennium as is held by many Christians.

But long before the book of Revelation was written men dreamed of an age when righteousness and peace would be triumphant. Indeed, it seems to be an innate conviction of

[1] Revelation 20. 1–10.

mankind that in a world governed by a righteous God there must come a time when goodness will prevail in the earth. Even pagans have cherished this expectation, as is shown by the writings of Hesiod, Ovid, Vergil, and others. Every Bible student will remember the glowing pictures in the prophecy of Isaiah of a redeemed world in which there shall be concord among the forces of nature, the creatures of the animal world, and the human race.[2] In the prophecies of Joel, Amos, Zephaniah, Ezekiel, Zechariah, Malachi, and others there are predictions of "the day of Jehovah," in which punishment will be meted out to the false nations and to recreant Israel, followed by a reconstruction of the national life, in which the supremacy of righteousness will be attained. It is in the book of Daniel, however, that this idea is carried forward into its most spiritual implications. Not only is an everlasting kingdom to be established upon the ruins of alien empires, but the heavenly power by which this is to be accomplished will be embodied in "one like unto a son of man," who in the prophet's vision "came even to the ancient of days, and they brought him near before him. And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all the

[2] Isaiah 11. 1–9; also chapters 35, 55, 60.

peoples, nations, and languages should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed."[3]

The Origin of the Millennial Idea

In the period of Jewish history just preceding the birth of Christ these ideas of the final establishment of an era of righteousness and peace took on more definite forms, and in the Book of Enoch, which has no place in our Bible, we have predictions which furnish a link between the apocalyptic messages of the ancient Hebrews and the New Testament teaching about "last things." Out of the indistinct visions of the oldest seers and the more precise announcements of the later Hebrew prophets there slowly grew such a doctrine of the victory of righteousness in the long ages to come as made it easy to develop the idea of a millennium, the trade-mark of which was an age of blessedness on the earth before and separate from the final happiness of the world to come.

But the imagination of man was not content with such restrained prophecies. Theories blossomed luxuriantly. Details were plentifully supplied. It was assumed that the his-

[3] Daniel 7. 13, 14.

tory of the world was divided into seven portions, corresponding with the seven days in the Genesis account of creation. Each of these divisions would cover a thousand years, and there would be six thousand years of labor, followed by a thousand years of rest. The last portion would be the millennium. This is a view which has its adherents to-day among Christians who are not familiar with the records of human existence on this planet, and who believe that the six thousand years are about completed, and that the seventh thousand will begin very shortly. On the other hand, some who realize the difficulty of adjusting history to such a chronology suggest that what are called "days-years," founded on 2 Peter 3. 8, are to be reckoned, and not years of twelve months each. This would make the time of the millennium 365,000 years of ordinary length. Many curious theories of computation have been advanced, including the suggestion that, in making account of prophetic measures of time, we must remember that astronomy reveals three kinds of years, namely, the solar, the lunar, and the calendar, determined by the different revolutions of the earth relative to the sun and the moon. By using each of these years as any particular case may require, dates can be shuffled to suit

one's preference. In the Talmud various fanciful descriptions of the blessedness which the millennium will bring are given, including the declaration that when the Messianic kingdom has been established each vine will yield a thousand branches, each branch a thousand clusters, each cluster a thousand grapes, and each grape twenty-five measures of wine.

Variations in Millennial Influence

The idea of the final reign of righteousness has captivated men everywhere even outside of Jewish and Christian influences. In our own times the thought of such a period possesses the imagination of multitudes. While not all speak of it as a definite period of a thousand years, they are looking forward to a time of ideal perfection in society. The only passage in Scripture on which the theory of a distinct period separated from that which precedes and from that which follows by clearly marked lines of distinction is based, is the one in Revelation already referred to. This seems to have been seized upon by the Christians of the first century, who doubtless expected the millennium to be inaugurated in the immediate future. When this did not occur, the ingenuity of men was set to work on the problem of explaining its delay. Eventually the doc-

trine itself became discredited because of the carnal ideas which were associated with it, especially by those who were affected by Jewish influences. It persisted, however, down to the fourth century of the Christian era, when the church was constrained to give it up by some of its foremost leaders, who supplanted it with other views. One of the most influential theories advanced came from the brain of Augustine, who said that the golden era had been in process ever since Christ established his church on the earth, and that the development of the Christian Church was in fact the millennium itself. That was taken so literally in connection with the passage in the twentieth chapter of Revelation that as the year A. D. 1000 approached, vast numbers of Christian people looked for the fulfillment of that prophecy, on the theory that the millennium was to precede Christ's return, after which would come the judgment and the end of the world. This did not happen, and new theories were demanded to account for the failure. A decline of interest in the subject naturally followed. At the time of the Protestant Reformation, in the sixteenth century, under the influence of a revived study of the Bible, new interest in the millennium was naturally awakened. But the grotesque and fleshly corruptions which the

Anabaptists and other extremists forced into the doctrine brought it into great disrepute. Since that period it has not enjoyed the favor it obtained in the early church. The majority of Christians have held that, while the millennium has not yet come, it will be eventually brought to pass through the triumph of Christianity, and that when it has arrived Christ will return, the gospel dispensation will be at an end, the judgment of humanity will be given, and the new order for mankind will be established.

Before or After the Return of Christ?

This is not a satisfactory theory to a very considerable body of Christians who insist that Christ will return to earth and assume a personal, visible, and bodily reign before any period which can be called the millennium has been inaugurated. Those who hold this opinion are called premillennialists, and those who hold a contrary opinion are called postmillennialists. On the supposition that there will be a definite period, separated from the rest of human history by strictly defined boundaries, and called the millennium, there is no necessary hostility between those Christians who contend that Christ will return before the thousand years begin and those who are

equally sure that he will not come again until after this period has been inaugurated. The one point on which all premillennialists are agreed is that Christ will appear before the millennium; and apparently there is no other point on which all of them do unite, unless it be that the millennium will occupy a thousand years, during which Christ and his saints will reign on the earth. Even here there are differences of interpretation concerning the thousand years, some holding that the phrase must be interpreted literally, and others that it means an indefinite period of great extent. Whether Christ is to come before or after the millennium is a question of scriptural interpretation. It affects no man's salvation. It is not essential to the Christian faith. Many godly persons think, however, that it is of large importance. There is no particular reason for taking away their confidence. "Think and let think" was John Wesley's admonition, and it is an admirable precept respecting all matters which are not essential to salvation and the progress of Christ's kingdom.

But a majority of premillennialists do not content themselves with merely affirming that Christ is coming before the millennium. They fill the space between the present and the second coming of Christ with a picture so dis-

heartening that one is amazed at the courage they show in the face of the tragedy they keep before their eyes. They also accompany the second coming of Christ with events which are in contradiction of the teachings of Jesus, and they set up a program of procedure for Christ which breaks down under the weight of its own absurdity. Against such perversions of the simplicity of the gospel we may well direct our criticisms.

Scriptural Basis of the Millennium

Before taking these objectionable teachings into consideration, however, it is important that attention should be given to the passage which lies at the foundation of all theories of the millennium that make it a strictly defined period of blessedness during which Christ will reign in visible and material splendor upon the earth. It is true that millenarians teach that the real basis of their doctrine is found in Hebrew prophecy, and that the famous passage in Revelation is a supplemental detail of an event already foretold. But so general are the terms of ancient prophecy, and so capable are they of differing interpretations that, if it were not for this one passage, the citations from the Hebrew prophets would probably be regarded as chiefly proclaiming a far-off conquest of the

world to righteousness and peace, such as mankind has always dreamed would some day appear, only in a spiritual and lofty sense which no pagan mind has ever conceived. No description of this passage is required. We may let it speak for itself.

"And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key of the abyss and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold on the dragon, the old serpent, which is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, and cast him into the abyss, and shut *it,* and sealed *it* over him, that he should deceive the nations no more, until the thousand years should be finished: after this he must be loosed for a little time.

"And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and *I saw* the souls of them that had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus, and for the word of God, and such as worshiped not the beast, neither his image, and received not the mark upon their forehead and upon their hand; and they lived, and reigned with Christ a thousand years. The rest of the dead lived not until the thousand years should be finished. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: over these the second death hath no power; but they shall

be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years.

"And when the thousand years are finished, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison, and shall come forth to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to the war: the number of whom is as the sand of the sea. And they went up over the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city: and fire came down out of heaven, and devoured them. And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where are also the beast and the false prophet; and they shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever."[4]

It may not be amiss to suggest in this connection that a single passage is a somewhat unsafe basis on which to build so important a teaching as is the doctrine of the millennium. This hint creates no hesitation in the mind of a confirmed millenarian, who insists that if there were but a solitary line on this subject in all the Bible, it would be perfectly adequate. But for the majority of Christians the absence of any other passage in the Bible of like import is exceedingly significant. The fundamental doctrines of Christianity are built

[4] Revelation 20. 1–10.

upon many passages. If we had but one brief expression on which to construct our doctrine of the Trinity or of the deity of Jesus Christ, we should naturally be a little careful about the amount of dependence to be placed upon that isolated text.

Embarrassment is naturally increased if the one passage upon which a doctrine is built happens to be found in a book full of symbolical or allegorical language such as so abundantly pervades the book of Revelation. The doctrine of the millennium, as taught by many in our time, is based on one passage out of the most obscure and difficult book in the New Testament, the full meaning of which, it is safe to say, not even the wisest millenarian has yet been able satisfactorily to explain.

Still there are minds that would be satisfied with even such an uncertain foundation for a doctrine, provided the passage seemed to support a theory which was dear to them. But even they must experience a little disquietude if they are shown that this passage, when literally interpreted, as they insist on doing, is in hopeless conflict with other scriptures when a literal interpretation is also given to them. This embarrassment will be clearly seen later when the claims of premillennialists are under examination. For the present it may be put

aside, and it is mentioned here only to suggest caution in the use made of the passage before us.

The Book of Revelation

This remarkable piece of scripture can be interpreted without throwing overboard any other bit of writing in the New Testament, but this is possible only by permitting the book of Revelation to stand in its own quality instead of forcing upon it a character which it does not bear. It is a masterpiece of literary composition, a fact which ought not to be considered harmful to its spiritual values. The scholars say it is not written in the best Greek, but that does not seriously impair its worth as a book which speaks directly to the souls of men. The very practical people who turn scornfully away from this wonderful production because to them it is a phantasmagorical aberration of a too highly imaginative mind, simply show how superficial they are. On the same ground they would hurl to the scrapheap Dante's immortal epic, Milton's Paradise Lost, and even Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress. We have in this book an unsurpassed series of pictures which for boldness, vividness, and startling contrasts of light and shadow have never been approached by the genius of

man. That fact should be allowed to sink to the depths of one's mind before undertaking to explain this extraordinary work.

It was produced in an age when the Christian Church was not only under suspicion in the Roman empire, but when those who called themselves Christians might well feel that the triumph of their faith was in actual doubt; when, therefore, the supreme need of the hour was to keep before the minds of Christians the truth that their Lord could not fail and that fidelity to him would bring certain rewards, while opposition to him would result in the destruction of his enemies. The letters to the seven churches of Asia one after another hold these things up before the mind, not only in graphic pictures, but also in stirring precepts. Those to whom they are addressed are told to be faithful unto death. Christ is coming to give every man his reward. Let them take heed that they do not lose their crown. To him that overcometh shall be given an exceeding great recompense.[5]

The literary form of the book gives the key to the method by which it is to be interpreted. It is gloriously set forth at the very beginning. After a few introductory sentences the document opens with a vision of the eternal Christ.

[5] Revelation 2. 7, 10, 17, 26–28; 3. 5, 12, 21.

Certain letters to the seven churches then follow, and they are no sooner concluded than the series of visions is renewed, and they continue until the very end of the book. If people had kept in mind the form which the writer adopted, and had proceeded to interpret the book in the spirit in which it was evidently written, they would have been saved an immense amount of trouble and a still larger quantity of foolishness. In no other literature except that of the Bible do people undertake to interpret an allegory as they would a set of precepts. It seems to be offensive to certain minds to assume that the Holy Spirit would operate through a variety of literary forms. By some it is regarded as almost a piece of sacrilege to call any work in the Bible by its right designation. It seems to them to take away from the sublime spiritual motive of the Scriptures to assert that any human element is to be found within them. If the book of Revelation were in any other compilation than the Bible, it would immediately be described as allegory, and no attempt would be made to consider it in any other light. It is no more an attack upon the spiritual quality of the Scriptures to call a piece of biblical literature poetry, allegory, fiction, or philosophy than it is to recognize

that certain portions are history and other parts are divine ordinances.

Principles of Interpretation

If the book of Revelation is seen to be allegorical from beginning to end, it is a piece of impropriety to try to interpret it in any hard-and-fast literal sense. When we read the Sermon on the Mount or the Ten Commandments we do not hesitate to pronounce that they are to be taken as exactly what they appear to be, and, word for word, we set them down in our minds as rules of conduct which have been inspired by divine Wisdom. But when we take up other forms of writing found within the Scriptures, if we use only ordinary judgment, we strive to interpret them according to the mold into which their author has cast them. It would be an absurdity to interpret Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress as anything but an allegory, but we do not lose the spiritual significance of that immortal work by adopting this plan. We agree that it is not a history of actual events, but that all the spiritual experiences which are therein narrated have a basis in fact. Thousands of human beings have proved them in their own lives. So the book of Revelation is not a record of things

which have been, or a proclamation of things that are to be in the precisely factual manner that we concede to a work of history or a treatise on mathematics or a work on physical science. It is well within the ability of the modern engineer to tell us the quantity of coal stored up in the anthracite regions of our country, and to estimate with almost perfect accuracy the length of time that will be required to exhaust this supply at the present rate of consumption. But that is a process of exact computation, pursued according to methods which have been established through long years of study. But to declare that in the same way an examination of an allegorical book in the Scriptures will enable the investigator to set down in the calendar of history the events which are to follow through the course of time until eternity shall be revealed is nothing short of absurd. It would never have been dreamed of but for the fact that a certain artificial character has been deliberately fastened upon the literature of the Scriptures. It ought to be sufficient refutation of the theory that the book of Revelation is to be interpreted literally, that the pictures of heaven which it contains are not only impossible of literal reproduction, but are unsatisfactory to the aspiring soul of man. The true thing to be

said about them is that with a perfect prodigality of rhetorical figures the writer undertook to forecast the transcendent glory of the celestial world, the details of which surpass the ability of any man to portray.

Since the book of Revelation is of this character, the attempt to find an exact counterpart in real life, past, present, or future, to each of the items so dramatically presented within its pages is futile. He who puts his finger on a text and then points to an event, and says the one absolutely means the other, is involved in inextricable confusion. All through the Christian centuries men have been trying to do this. One dead-sure correspondence after another has been exploded by the developments of history. That has not daunted the literalist, who has gone straight on inventing new proofs for the identification of an event which occurred yesterday with something which the author of the book of Revelation predicted nineteen hundred years ago. It is an unprofitable performance.

The book of Revelation is not intended to be a mystery, but the unveiling of that which has been concealed. The symbolism in it was supposed by the author to be intelligible to those for whom his book was written. It is a revelation "of Jesus Christ, which God gave

him to show unto his servants, *even* the things which must shortly come to pass: and he sent and signified *it* by his angel unto his servant John."[6] The writer gives in his book the visions which have glowed in his inspired mind, and he pronounces blessings upon those who read, those who hear, and those who keep the things he has recorded, saying, "The time is at hand."[7]

Christ appears in the beginning and he speaks at the end of the book. His glory irradiates every page. His triumph rises over all its scenes of strife and confusion. The book describes the conflicts of Christ and his saints and the victory they achieve. The struggle with sin and Satan is terrific, but it ends in the overthrow of iniquity. The church moves on from the wilderness to the land of promise; from trial to triumph.

Some devout scholars regard the book of Revelation as an expansion of Christ's apocalyptic discourse recorded in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. A comparison of the ideas expressed in both will show strong resemblances. John's mind was filled with the imagery in the prophecies of Daniel, Ezekiel, and Isaiah. The thought of Jewish Christians in his day is reflected by him. The millennial

[6] Revelation 1. 1. [7] Revelation 1. 3.

age he pictures is the era of the Messiah which began with the establishment of the Christian dispensation. The end of that age he thinks to be near. Tested by ordinary computations of time, this could not be, but in the measurements of the divine mind John's prediction is right—"the time is at hand."

How to Deal with Chapter XX

From this point of view the process of interpreting the one basic millennial passage is not difficult. Let us first pursue the method we should use with any other book if we found in the midst of it a chapter which seemed, standing by itself, to resist all efforts to discover its significance. We should go back to that which preceded it and try to ascertain how the author had developed his thought until it reached that particular point. The nineteenth chapter of Revelation must be read, especially from the eleventh verse, in order to understand what is leading up to the twentieth chapter; and then the twenty-first chapter must be read to understand what is the end of the general scheme of this allegorical representation. Having read the nineteenth chapter, we are convinced that this is a vision of Christ conquering. No other person in the universe could be called "King of

kings and Lord of lords." What is he conquering? The nations of the world. How is he doing this? By the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. What does this militant exhibition mean? That the good is triumphant over the evil. Was that a thing of which the people of John's day needed assurance? It certainly was. Is that a thing of which we need to be assured? It certainly is.

But when did this crusade of conquest occur? and if it has not yet transpired, when will it commence? The answer is that it has been proceeding ever since Christ began his work in the world; that is, from that day in Eden when the work of redemption was announced, and the prophecy was uttered that the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head. And it will continue until the redemptive process has been finished and the triumph of the good has become known everywhere in the world. In other words, this is a vision of the divine struggle against iniquity, led by the Son of God, and it has been progressing during the entire existence of mankind on this planet.

But some say that this is a prophecy of the second coming of Christ. This is impossible. For it is totally unlike anything which Christ foretold. It is out of harmony with every-

thing the apostles said. Jesus declared that he would come suddenly on the clouds of glory to judge the world and to appoint men to their various destinies. That picture is wholly dissimilar to the contents of this passage, which represents a martial hero coming on a white horse, leading the armies of heaven, going out to a great fight. As is well known, premillennialists make this the concluding act in the drama of "the tribulation," a period of time which they have inserted between the coming of Christ to take his saints out of the world with him and the time when he and they will return to the earth to judge the world, a period of incredible suffering for humanity, to be closed by the utter destruction of the Antichrist. But this is an arbitrary performance which looks like an artifice deemed necessary to hold their program together in anything like a consistent scheme. We shall find later how utterly unwarranted this is, since it makes not one coming again of our Lord, but two such events, and disarranges the simple order of events proclaimed by our Lord. It is enough at this point to say that the picture in Revelation 19. 11-21 is a symbolical putting of the age-long contest between right and wrong under the leadership of Christ, as opposed by his enemies, which is to ensue at last in the

complete overthrow of iniquity and the consummate triumph of righteousness.

The Binding of Satan

An intelligent approach to the millennial passage, Revelation 20. 1-10, is thus made possible. The fight is not going to last forever. An angel with the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain binds Satan and flings him into prison for a thousand years. Let us remember that this is an allegorical book—and let us not seek a literal interpretation for the chain, the key, or the thousand years. To do so is to defeat the very spirit of the book. What are a thousand years in the illimitable time at the disposal of the eternal Son of God? The significance of what is written by Peter is clear: "One day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day."[8] He has all the time there is, and every epochal event in the career of the world is a proof that he takes all the time he deems necessary and experiences no sense of haste or urgency, knowing that eternity is his. Observe again that Satan is simply under restraint. His destruction will come at a later time, after the thousand years, that long indefinite period which covers the history of the Messianic age. Now

[8] 2 Peter 3. 8.

he is simply crippled. He is in a pit that is bottomless. He is sealed up that he may not escape. But he is a spirit, and stone walls and steel bulwarks cannot completely neutralize the operations of a spiritual being whose access to spiritual beings is by means of spiritual channels of communication.

But this binding of Satan: when did it begin and what does it mean? It began as soon as Christ opened the dispensation in which we are now living. We know the devils were subject to him. We know that he throttled Satan on the mount of temptation. We know that he said, "I beheld Satan fallen as lightning from heaven."[9] We know that the Son of God was "manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil."[10] We know that through all the long centuries of human history he has been doing this thing, and this is the binding which is symbolized in the material figures employed by John.

Has Christ actually been binding Satan through the centuries? Observe the marks of his triumph. Where is human slavery in civilized nations to-day? When it was put out of the way a great chain was wound around the adversary. It is not necessary to go into detail at this point. Further exposition of the

[9] Luke 10. 18. [10] 1 John 3. 8.

increasing triumph of righteousness in the world appears elsewhere in these pages. Attention need here be called only to the fact that, in our own generation, the progressive conquests of Christ have been remarkably displayed. The prohibition of vodka in Russia, the banishment of opium and the suppression of the cultivation of the poppy in China, the gradual abolition of the organized liquor traffic in the United States are among the evidences in our own day that Christ is in the midst of the nations. These so clearly manifest the advance of his power in the earth that it seems almost incredible that any persons with eyes open and minds alert should fail to see that the progress of Christ's kingdom is steady and sure.

But, is Satan crippled in any definite sense? How can a Christian doubt this? Does he suppose that evil is left unrestrained to make havoc in the world? Knowing the inveterate character of sin, does any man doubt that if it were left without restraint it would have long since utterly destroyed the human family? In a still higher sense, is it not true that saved people, those reckoned to be saints, are exempt from the attacks of sin which so terribly devastate those who have not turned to God? Did not Christ himself say that no one

was competent to pluck out of his hands those whom God had committed to him?[11] It seems amazing that anybody should doubt that Satan's power in the earth, not only in the large way described in historic events, but in the narrower and more individualistic forms of contact with persons, has been gradually crippled in this gospel dispensation through the preaching of the truth, the means of grace, and the protection of the Holy Spirit.

The Enthronement of Saints

But what shall be said about the saints reigning with Christ during the thousand years—not merely those who were martyred, but all who worshiped not the beast? The answer is another question. Can we think that these saints are dead, and that they are awaiting the coming of the Lord? that they are in some inactive or unconscious state, and that until they are called from their graves they have no participation in the blessedness of the life hid with Christ in God? The conception is revolting, and has no foundation in anything Christ has taught. Where are these saints? With Christ, of course. Where else could they be? Have they not been going to him through all these long centuries? Are they not with

[11] John 10. 28, 29.

him now? Jesus said in his great priestly prayer, "I desire that they also whom thou hast given me be with me where I am."[12] In a deep spiritual sense, are they not reigning?

"The rest of the dead lived not until the thousand years should be finished."[13] Nothing could be plainer. Only the good who are dead have risen into that eternal life which Christ came to reveal. The evil who are dead are still dead in trespasses and in sin. We know that is fact, because Jesus declared it: "The hour cometh, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God; and they that hear shall live."[14] "This is the first resurrection." It is a continuous process through all the ages. As men hear the voice of God in Christ and respond they live, and as they turn deaf ears to that voice they die. It is not a question of the dissolution of their physical bodies, but rather of choices which they make. There will be for those who refuse the voice of the Son of God as well as for those who have heard his voice and respond a final resurrection when their bodies will indeed come out of the graves. That is the only resurrection which the spiritually dead will ever have. The good will rise to everlasting life. The bad will rise to everlasting condemnation. That is their second

[12] John 17. 24. [13] Revelation 20 .5. [14] John 5. 25.

death, for evil people die twice, once when they pass out of this earthly life, and again when they are condemned to eternal death. But the saint dies only once, though he has a double resurrection. He rises to life eternal when he hears and responds to the summons of Christ, and he rises with the glorified body at last when all who are in their graves shall come forth. "Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: over these the second death hath no power; but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years."[15]

But when the thousand years, that indefinite period called the millennium, are over, it is said Satan will be released. Undoubtedly, for his destruction must be brought about by contact with the conquering forces of righteousness in a final conflict. In the last desperate charge essential to his complete overthrow the saints will have their glorious part. It is perfectly natural that evil should come to its most hideous climax in that ultimate struggle—which does not mean that there will be a vaster number of evil people on the earth than ever cursed the world before, but that the character of sin is such that its most virulent development will come at the end of the age.

[15] Revelation 20. 6.

Christ's Second Coming

But Christ's forces will win. The nations will be won to his standard, and then he will come in visible presence, when the final stroke will be delivered by the Mighty One who through centuries has led his hosts. He will come to take his kingdom and to absorb all kingdoms into it. He will sit in judgment as he himself precisely predicted. Then the ultimate overthrow of evil will be established before angels and men. All this is described in the passage beginning with Revelation 20. 11, and running to the end of the chapter. Iniquity will then no longer curse the earth. A new heaven and a new earth, as typified by the imagery of the twenty-first chapter of Revelation, will be brought to pass. Immortal glory and everlasting development toward God will be the blessed fortune of the redeemed. As John has so gloriously said: "It is not yet made manifest what we shall be. We know that, if he shall be manifested, we shall be like him; for we shall see him even as he is. And every one that hath this hope set on him purifieth himself, even as he is pure."[16]

[16] 1 John 3. 2, 3.

CHAPTER X

MILLENNIAL FANCIES AND FALLACIES

"THE Polynesians imagine that the sky descends at the horizon and incloses the earth," says Max Müller. For this reason they name foreigners "heaven-bursters," people who have broken in from an outside world. In his Apocalypse John says, "I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband."[1] This is the finest phrasing we have of humanity's fadeless dream that the celestial world will some day enswathe the earth. The hope is divinely inspired, its fulfillment is sure.

The expectation of the final triumph of Christ and his saints, attended by the establishment of a universal kingdom of righteousness and peace, is such a glorious inspiration to faith and godliness that it is an incalculable misfortune that its beauty should be marred by attaching to it crude and fantastic theories of the millennium and the process by which this period of felicity is to be introduced.

[1] Revelation 21. 2.

Reference has been made several times in these pages to the artificial programs which premillennialists have devised to precede, accompany, and follow the second advent of Christ. It is difficult to treat all the advocates of these schemes of the future with perfect fairness because they differ much among themselves, as an examination of the plentiful literature they have issued will prove. However, the framework of their several structures is practically the same. It may be roughly outlined, though the frequent appearance of books on the subject, with their divergent theories, leaves the impression that in details the doctrine, like the time-tables of certain steamboat lines, is subject to change without notice. In a general way, however, the following may be regarded as a truthful declaration of premillennial teaching, as presented by its most influential expositors.

The Premillennial Program

The Christian Church will not bring in the millennium. It is not expected to transform human society. The preaching of the gospel is not designed to save the world, which is incorrigible. Its first purpose is to bear witness unto all nations. Its second purpose is to gather out of the visible church the elect,

the saints, those who compose the body of Christ.

The world will steadily grow worse, being inveterately sinful, and the church will become relatively feebler. Toward the end of this dispensation the very climax of iniquity will be attained, and evil in some incomparably terrible form will appear. When it would seem that affairs are at their lowest, and while men are entirely preoccupied with the concerns of this fleshly life, suddenly Christ will come.

Instantly the saints who are in their graves will be raised from the dead and, with the saints who are living on the earth, will be caught up in the air to meet their Lord and continue with him. In the parlance of premillennialists this is "The Rapture."

During this period of communion by Christ and his church apart from the world "The Great Tribulation" will occur on the earth. It will last not less than seven years, and will be a time of unexampled suffering, during which the Antichrist will appear, and those who refuse him homage will be slain. These are called "the tribulation saints."

Following this interval of anguish Christ and the saints who were caught up in the air will return to find the world largely given over to apostasy. This crisis is called "The Reve-

lation." Whereas "The Rapture" was not observed by mankind generally, "The Revelation" will be visible to all.

The Antichrist will be put out of the way, the "tribulation saints" will be raised from the dead, the devil will be chained for a thousand years, and the nations having been judged, Christ will establish his millennial reign.

Israel will be restored to Palestine and gathered into Christ's kingdom, Jerusalem will become the capital of the world, Jesus will sit on his throne, and with his saints will extend his reign over the earth.

A period of peace and righteousness will be inaugurated. The physical universe will be so changed as to conform to this new era. It will be a time of unusual prosperity and righteousness, the establishment of the kingdom of God on the earth.

After this period, designated as a thousand years, the devil will be let loose for a little space, with the most frightful consequences. Presently the final struggle between Christ and the hosts of iniquity will occur. This will result in the absolute overthrow of unrighteousness and the complete destruction of the devil. Then the heavenly order of human society will be established, and Christ and his hosts will reign forever.

Additional details are given by some premillennialists with an exuberant fancy which knows no curb, but they are not essential to this general outline.

It will be noted that the outstanding features of this schedule are: (1) The inevitable moral decline of the world, which is thought to be growing worse every day. (2) The equally certain decline of the church, which in proportion to its number of adherents is becoming less spiritual every day. (3) The failure of the present dispensation to accomplish more than the proclamation of the gospel and the gathering of a remnant of saints with whom to make a new beginning. (4) The absolute necessity that Christ should appear in bodily presence to set up the kingdom of God on earth, though that kingdom was declared to be "at hand" nineteen centuries ago. (5) The certainty that this kingdom will put forth its power in a material, physical, or earthly fashion.

Structure of the Schedule

This plan of the future is a composite of passages taken arbitrarily from many parts of the Old Testament and the New, and cemented together by the ingenuity of men who take delight in such feats of skill. Fundamental to

this mosaic is the twentieth chapter of Revelation, to which consideration has already been given in these pages. It is true that much not found in this chapter has been employed to introduce elements of importance. Nevertheless, the conception of the millennium, without which this schedule would be impossible, has no scriptural foundation outside this passage. Premillennialists hold that Revelation 20 is to be taken literally. They believe that the author of the Apocalypse was inspired to set down this prophecy word for word as it appears, and they quote his anathema against any who may be rash enough to take away from the words of his book.[2] But they also believe that every other part of the Bible is inspired in the same way, and must be literally interpreted, save where the language is declared to be figurative by the writer or plainly indicated to be such by the very manner in which it is used. Special stress is laid upon the necessity of giving a literal interpretation to Christ's words, as recorded in the four Gospels, and to the Epistles of Paul, who wrote more of the New Testament than any other man. On the supposition that this is the correct attitude toward the interpretation of Scripture, let us put this passage in Revela-

[2] Revelation 22. 19.

tion 20 beside other teachings of the New Testament which deserve equal respect and veneration, and observe the result.

"Understandest Thou What Thou Readest?"

An exposition of Christ's personal teachings respecting his second advent has been made in previous chapters, and need not now be reviewed. Paul added a few things to the subject which are supplementary to the words of Jesus, and in harmony with them. The following passages are of chief significance: "Behold, I tell you a mystery: We all shall not sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed."[3] This description corresponds with what Christ says about his advent being as a flash of lightning across the sky.[4]

In order to comfort the Thessalonians who were sorrowing for lost loved ones, and wondering whether, on the supposition that Christ's return was very near, these departed friends and relatives would share the triumph of their Lord with those who were alive at his coming, Paul writes to them: "But we would not have you ignorant, brethren, concerning

[3] 1 Corinthians 15. 51, 52.

[4] Matthew 24. 27.

them that fall asleep; that ye sorrow not, even as the rest, who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also that are fallen asleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we that are alive, that are left unto the coming of the Lord, shall in no wise precede them that are fallen asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven, with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first; then we that are alive, that are left, shall together with them be caught up in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words."[5]

Having added these descriptive passages to what we have already examined in the teachings of Christ and his apostles, let us compare with these scriptures a literal interpretation of the twentieth chapter of Revelation. The world is going on in its customary way when suddenly, in an instant, a voice is heard and Christ appears. Then the saints who are dead, both the martyred ones mentioned in this passage and also all the faithful servants of Christ who are asleep in death, and with them the

[5] 1 Thessalonians 4. 13–18.

righteous who are alive, will be changed and caught up to meet the Lord in the clouds. Their bodily resurrection at the second coming of Christ is clearly taught.[6] Now attach this to Revelation 20. 1-3. An angel from heaven having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand is represented as binding Satan and flinging him into the abyss and sealing it up so that for a thousand years he will not be at liberty to deceive the nations.

Those Who Remain After "The Rapture"

What shall we say about the persons who are still alive and upon the earth? The saints have been caught up to meet their Lord. The devil has been banished from the earth, but the unsaved who are alive are still on this planet. They are going on as before, and will continue for a thousand years, during which thirty generations will be born and die. These unsaved people have no Satan to tempt them, for he is in prison. But neither have they any saints to teach them righteousness, and there is no intimation of any turning to God during this millennium in the only passage in the Bible which mentions it. Knowing what we do about the tendency of sin to increase, we should expect

[6] 1 Corinthians 15. 23, 35, 44.

a terrible moral and spiritual decline within the thousand years.

But it may be said that the supposition is that the saints who were caught up in the air to be with their Lord have returned. Yet the naked text does not say so. It simply declares they are reigning with Christ during the thousand years. It does not fix the place. But suppose it is on the earth. Remember the unsaved are still there. They are marrying and giving in marriage. They are buying and selling. They are giving birth to children. They are dying. Alongside of them, if the saints have returned with their Lord, are people who have died and risen from the dead and will never die again. Is such a mixture of relationships credible? A part of the population are immortals who cannot die, and a part are mortals who must die, living together on the same planet. Surely, this is confusing the present age with the age to come in a most astonishing way, and is to thoughtful persons unbelievable.

But suppose the saints with the Lord have not returned to the earth, but are still somewhere between heaven and earth, and plainly in sight of the wicked who are still living and dying on the earth. This is as incomprehensible as the former hypothesis. What has

become of the idea of human probation? The conditions are now so changed that the people who live in the millennial period and those who had lived before it must certainly be judged by totally different standards. Nothing else would be fair and just, but such an adjustment is not mentioned, and would be incredible.

Conflict with Reason and Revelation

But suppose the saints are neither on earth nor in the upper air, but have actually disappeared into heaven just as Christ did at his ascension. Then we have this dilemma: Christ has appeared to everybody's view, as he himself prophesied, and as the Apocalypse of John affirms.[7] He has disappeared from the earth, taking with him all the saved people living and dead. Later he returns to the earth with the saints to judge the world. This, then, will be his third coming to the world and not his second advent, which teaching is contrary to every other part of the scriptures referring to the subject.

But these difficulties are not the end of trouble. When the thousand years are over, according to the passage before us, Satan is to be released, and he is to be welcomed by

[7] Revelation 1. 7.

a host as numerous as the sands of the sea,[8] who follow him and make war upon the saints who have either been on the earth, in the mid-air, or in heaven, and have returned. In any case it is obvious that the people who live through the millennium have been, in the main, a most degenerate population, or the devil would not have such a massive army back of him. Thus the millennium is shown to have been, not a triumphant and universal reign of righteousness, but a time of increasing moral and spiritual decline. Things have gone to the bad most disastrously.

Furthermore, if Christ has been reigning on the earth in visible presence during that period of a thousand years, we are compelled to conclude that the revolt against him and his government has occurred in spite of the majesty of his presence and the power of his sovereignty. This is, of course, unthinkable. Moreover, it is not credible that Christ would retreat from the kingdom over which he has been ruling for a thousand years in order that his enemy, the devil, might have a final chance to display his power, even though it were for the purpose of the ultimate manifestation of the glory and supremacy of Christ.

In any case, Satan's triumph is short. Fire

[8] Revelation 20. 8.

falls from heaven, the great throne appears, the books of judgment are opened, and all men are compelled to render an account according to their works. Nevertheless, what is put forth by a literal interpretation of this passage is that when Christ comes the second time he is to have but a temporary and abortive reign of a thousand years before he has his final victory over Satan and hell. This is simply contradictory of all the scriptures outside of this one passage which bear on Christ's second advent. A literal interpretation of Revelation 20 cannot be fitted into a literal interpretation of other important parts of the Bible.

But there are more definite and impressive conflict with the scriptures than even those which have been just mentioned. Let us take up some of them.

Direct Contradictions of Scripture

Jesus said that at his return the sun and moon would cease to shine, and the stars would fall from heaven.[9] This implies the breaking up of the present order of nature. In Revelation 20. 11 we have the more vivid description—"from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them." But this disturbance in

[9] Matthew 24. 29; Mark 13. 24, 25.

the universe occurs after the thousand years, according to this passage. If, therefore, Christ comes before the thousand years and, in accordance with his own proclamation in his great apocalyptic discourse, there is a catastrophe in the physical order at that time, we have two such ordeals, and between them stretch a thousand years. After breaking up the universal order at his coming the world must have been set going again for a thousand years. Then it was broken up once more, and the platform upon which the millennium has been proceeding is torn to pieces a second time. Between these catastrophes Satan has been released and has been given an opportunity to assault the hosts of righteousness.

How Many Judgments?

At the conclusion of his apocalyptic discourse we have Christ's wonderful picture of the final judgment, beginning as follows: "But when the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the angels with him, then shall he sit on the throne of his glory: and before him shall be gathered all the nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as the shepherd separateth the sheep from the goats; and he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left." He finishes this graphic

picture by announcing that those on his left hand will go into everlasting punishment, while the righteous shall go into life eternal. This is the final judgment, and it is to occur at our Lord's second coming, as he himself says.[10]

Now, if that second coming is to be before the thousand years described in Revelation 20, then we must suppose that after this separation at the judgment the wicked who have been given their doom assert themselves again when the thousand-year period has been concluded; for, according to this passage, a horrid crew as numberless as the sands of the sea comes out to battle against the hosts of righteousness, as described in verse 9. To say that after the judgment at the second coming this will occur, and a thousand years later, is unthinkable. Moreover, as recorded in verses 12 and 15, the final judgment is to take place no one can tell exactly when, but at least subsequent to the millennium. So that we have two judgments separated by at least a thousand years.

How Many Resurrections?

Jesus announced that all that are in their graves shall one day hear his voice and shall come forth; they that have done good into the

[10] Matthew 25. 31–46.

resurrection of life, and they that have done evil into the resurrection of condemnation. This can only refer to the final resurrection and judgment at his coming; but in the millennial passage we read: "And the sea gave up the dead that were in it; and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. And death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death, *even* the lake of fire. And if any was not found written in the book of life, he was cast into the lake of fire."[11] Thus we have two resurrections and judgments, separated by a thousand years. In the first resurrection the saints, or the elect known as the body of Christ, will be raised. Then the thousand years will pass, and both the good and the bad, saved and unsaved, who have lived and died during the period of the thousand years will be raised; and this in addition to the spiritual resurrection referred to in John 5. 25 and Ephesians 2. 6. Three resurrections are in utter discord with the plan mentioned in all other passages in the New Testament, and must be dismissed as irreconcilable with reason.

Christ also announced that he would raise his people on the last day.[12] In order to accom-

[11] Revelation 20. 13–15.

[12] John 6. 39, 40, 44.

modate the double resurrection separated by a thousand years, as required by a literal interpretation of Revelation 20, we are compelled to call the whole period "the last day." That is, "the last day," which may be understood as a single period of indefinite length, must include the resurrection of the righteous, the thousand-year binding of Satan, his release, the assault and overthrow of Gog and Magog, and the final judgment. Merely to state this dilemma is to refute the acceptance of this passage as literal.

Paul speaks of the voice which will awaken the servants of Christ at "the last trump."[13] But, according to the premillennial theory founded on this passage from Revelation 20, the righteous are raised before the millennium and the wicked after it. There are two resurrections separated by a thousand years. The wicked are raised latest, and after the thousand-year period. Hence "the last trump" is for them, according to this theory, though Paul says the dead in Christ rise first. Therefore, the trump which Paul speaks of can be, not the last, though he says it is, but some previous trump, with a period of a thousand years between.

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[13] 1 Corinthians 15. 52.

An Irreconcilable Theory

Without going into further details concerning the hopeless conflict between a literal interpretation of Revelation 20, and all other passages of the New Testament bearing on the question of Christ's second coming, we may leave the problem for those who are advocates of premillennialism to solve. There will be some who, on reading this comparison, will declare that in it the word of God has been handled deceitfully, but this will not be true. It may be affirmed in all solemnity, calling God to witness, that nothing has been done in this exposition but to place over against a literal interpretation of the passage from Revelation a certain number of unquestionable declarations from the lips of Christ himself and from the writings of his apostles, to show the utter impossibility of harmonizing the latter with the former on the supposition that all parts of Scripture are equally inspired, and, therefore, equally authoritative. Instead of one definite second coming of Christ, we have two separate second advents of our Lord. Instead of one bodily resurrection, we have two or more. Instead of one cataclysm in nature, we have two, with a thousand years rolling between. Instead of one final judgment, we have a variety of judgments. Of

course this cannot be without giving up what Christ and his apostles have said.

The premillennialists ask us so to twist what Christ and his apostles have uttered about the second coming as to make all the scriptures conform to this one obscure passage out of an admittedly allegorical book. Mere common sense would seem to dictate that if anything must be surrendered it is not the teaching of Christ and his apostles outside of this passage, but, rather, the one passage which cannot be made to fit into the others, if it is to be interpreted literally.

As a matter of fact, nothing is to be given up, if we apply to the Scriptures reasonable methods of interpretation. In the last chapter a view of Christ's second coming was broadly sketched, which is consistent with the teachings of Christ and his apostles, and in harmony with the figurative character of Revelation 19-21. The details of the Apocalypse of John are beyond the ability of any man now living to interpret with fidelity to each minute and microscopic item. No work of a similar character in any literature, sacred or secular, could be interpreted to its last infinitesimal point a thousand years after its author's decease, unless he had left a key to unlock its mysterious symbolism. The vain effort to explain

every detail in the Apocalypse of John is particularly unprofitable, in view of the fact that its main purposes are as clear as the noonday sun.

Further Criticisms and Objections

In Chapter VIII the fallacy of supposing that the world is inevitably growing worse, and the church correspondingly weaker, was shown by an appeal to the Scriptures and the records of history and current life. In the same connection it was demonstrated that the function of the church is larger than merely to provide the medium through which the gospel shall be preached as a witness and a company of the elect gathered out of humanity, with whom Christ will judge the world and establish his kingdom on the earth. In the last chapter it was shown that the millennial era progresses from the beginning of the gospel dispensation to the final return of Christ to judgment and universally acknowledged sovereignty. In various places the follies of a mechanical millenarianism have been exposed. It would be useless to follow up each vagary about Christ's second advent which has appeared in print. The number is legion, and their influence is narrow. Certain theories, prominent in nearly all premillennial

teaching, however, demand brief attention, as illustrations of the way in which the Scriptures are misapplied, when, indeed, they are not supplanted by purely human inventions.

Rapture, Tribulation, Revelation

One of the most flagrant examples of the artificial, arbitrary, and fantastic manipulations of Scripture of which some premillennialists are guilty is the process by which the program of events connected with what are known as "The Rapture, "The Tribulation," and "The Revelation" is set forth in their dismal scheme. We are told that we must clearly distinguish between these occurrences or we shall be in great difficulties. Starting with 1 Thessalonians, 4. 7, we are told that here we have the first fulfillment of the prophecy of Christ's second coming, which event is to be clearly separated from his actual coming to judge the world. What happens is that the saints who are alive, together with the saints who are dead and have been resurrected, are translated to meet the Lord in the air. This is called "The Rapture," and occurs without being observed by the world in general. The real foundation for this teaching is the passage just named. But to give it larger significance, other parts of Scripture which can be bent

toward this event are brought in. Reliance is placed, for example, on Luke 21. 28, the words of Jesus when, after describing the signs in the sun, moon, and stars, and the distress of nations which shall come upon the world, together with the advent of the Son of man in the clouds, it is said: "But when these things begin to come to pass, look up, and lift up your heads; because your redemption draweth nigh."[14] This is a good example of the manner in which Scripture is distorted. The phrases "look up" and "lift up" are supposed to point to the coming of Christ in the air; and the clause "your redemption draweth nigh" is taken to mean the first resurrection, and is said to be a parallel with Romans 8. 23, where are used the words "waiting for *our* adoption, *to wit,* the redemption of our body." Other passages are used in like fashion, but there is no need to consider them, one illustration being sufficient.

Now ensues a period of terrific suffering; the church, the bride of Christ, the saints, the elect, or by whatever term we care to designate the risen and glorified servants of Christ, having been taken away from the earth. During this period of excessive tribulation, which is not of long duration, the Antichrist is re-

[14] Luke 21. 28.

vealed,[15] the vials of God's wrath are poured forth, and the process of restoring Israel begins. Following this is a point of time called "The Revelation." This marks Christ's actual second coming to the earth when he appears to judge the quick and the dead and destroys the Antichrist. This dramatic series is amply supported by quotations from the Scriptures, but by such juggling of texts as one would think impossible on the part of a candid and intelligent Christian. Against such unworthy methods a protest was filed in Chapter I, to which the reader is referred.[16] There can be but one second coming of our Lord, and the simple language in which he predicted it gives no warrant for embellishing the event with artificial attachments.

It is interesting to note why and in what manner this program is set up. It is asserted that the time of our Lord's coming to the earth is preceded by his coming in the air to receive his bride, the church, unto himself, because Christ has much to do with his church before he comes back with his church to deal with the world. This explains, it is said, what Paul teaches about the restraint which is placed upon the man of sin.[17] This restraint has

[15] 2 Thessalonians 2. 8.

[16] 2 Thessalonians 2. 7.

[16] See pages 11–15.

something to do with the church. The church must be removed before the lawless one can be revealed on the earth; that is, before the Antichrist can stand forth in such a visible exhibition as to be recognized and destroyed.

It is affirmed that the Scriptures do not anywhere say that there will not be a considerable interval between the coming of Christ in the air and his coming with his saints to the earth, and, therefore, it is legitimate to assume such an interval, in view of what it is believed the church will require. Such a method of filling out the Bible from one's imagination is dangerous, but it is characteristic of premillennialists. Furthermore, there is nothing in the Scriptures to show that the coming of Christ to receive his saints who are caught up in the air to meet him will precede his coming to the earth to judge the quick and the dead. That is also a pure invention.

Other Guesses

"The Tribulation" is equally a matter of conjecture. Taking the words found in Matthew 24. 21-22; Mark 13. 24; Luke 21. 22-24, which a sound exegesis must make refer to the siege of Jerusalem and the scattering of the Jews, as the context plainly shows, and connecting them up with Daniel 12. 1, a period of

distress preceding the final judgment is satisfactorily arranged.

Now, it is perfectly clear that the men who recorded Christ's apocalyptic discourse believed that the destruction of Jerusalem and the final judgment were practically two phases of one great event. According to the Gospel of Matthew, Christ said: "Immediately after the tribulation,"[18] that is, after the destruction of Jerusalem, shall come what amounts to a dissolution of nature and betokens the coming of Christ to final judgment. In Mark's account we have, "In those days after that tribulation,"[19] which has been previously described. In Luke's account there is no note of time, though there is a full description of the distress.[20] This whole tribulation, so far as it lay in the minds of the men who wrote the Gospels, is connected with the destruction of Jerusalem, which we are to observe was identified in their minds with the final judgment. There is no warrant for placing this tribulation at some remote period just preceding the final judgment, as premillennialists will have it, though it may be held that all the events at the destruction of Jerusalem are types of what will occur on a larger scale at the end of the age. But this is not a matter of revelation.

[18] Matthew 24. 29. [19] Mark 13. 24. [20] Luke 21. 20–24.

The Bible is silent on it. The prophecies in Daniel were extant when Jesus uttered this apocalyptic discourse, and doubtless he knew precisely their meaning. Had he intended to make any such use of these prophecies as the premillennialists have adopted, he would have explicitly said so. And the very passage which is used to confirm the statement that our Lord had Daniel in his mind, indeed, he actually quoted him,[21] so unmistakably refers to the siege of Jerusalem that it seems singular for anybody to make any other interpretation.

The reason for inserting this "Tribulation" as a part of the final judgment in the program of the premillennialists between "The Rapture" and "The Revelation," or final coming of Christ to judgment with his saints, is quite innocently given by some who advocate it. They say that this distinction between the two stages of his coming again helps to explain many apparent discrepancies in the Bible on the subject of the second advent. Such a confession is amusing. The discrepancies referred to occur because of the unjustifiable use which is made of Scripture in order to fit a certain theory. There are no such difficulties if we remember that in some parts of Christ's apocalyptic discourse he was referring to the de-

[21] Matthew 24. 15; Mark 13. 14.

struction of Jerusalem and in other parts to the final judgment.

As a matter of fact, there are no passages of Scripture which describe any such period of tribulation between Christ's coming to take his saints and his coming to judge the world. The one which is sometimes used for this purpose, Luke 21. 36, doubtless refers to the destruction of Jerusalem and not to the final judgment. It is said that the famous passage, 2 Thessalonians 2. 7, 8, suggests that the entire time of "The Tribulation" is between the hour when Christ comes in the air for his saints and the hour of his return to the earth with them. To some minds this is probably the case. But to a careful student of the Bible, who has no theory to advance, it is difficult to discern how this passage hints at such a conclusion.

We have in this disposition to invent, fabricate, or mutilate, in the process of interpreting the Scriptures, an illustration of the fact that in treating with premillennialists we must allow them one of three options to explain their methods of exegesis:

First. They deliberately handle the word of God deceitfully, making texts conform to a preconceived theory entirely apart from their obvious meaning. This is an accusation which we do not care to bring, because it is too ter-

rible an indictment to place against any sincere followers of Christ.

Second. Ignorance of the manner in which the Bible has been produced, or an utter disregard of any human elements in its structure, an attitude which can be taken only by people who are deficient in education.

Third. The determination on the part of educated persons to hold to the traditional theory of the verbal dictation of the Scriptures from the first syllable to the last, in spite of the palpable contradictions which appear in their contents. It is rather difficult to perceive how scholarly men can adhere to this theory; but, as some of them do, we can only set it down to that strange perversity which even intellectual culture cannot overcome, and under the influence of which men in all ages have accepted doctrines which seem irrational to the majority of pious and thoughtful men.

CHAPTER XI

PROPHECY AND THE SECOND ADVENT

It is recorded of Marcus Aurelius that he said, "Hope not for the Republic of Plato, but be content with ever so small an advance, and look on even that as a gain worth having." As the noble pagan thought the ideals of the Greek philosopher were scarcely possible of realization, so many Christians doubt the wisdom of looking for the actual fulfillment of the ancient Hebrew prophecies relating to the redemption of society and the universal establishment of righteousness and peace in the earth. They believe that the least approach to such blessedness is to be hailed with joy, and that the farthest advance toward it should be sought, but that the full accomplishment of it is impossible. With this sentiment we cannot agree, but confidently expect that in due time the sublimest anticipations of the seers will become facts of history.

Many and various have been the contrivances which men have framed to help humanity reach the goal of its dreams from the days

of Plato to the latest hour of socialistic striving. These bear witness to the deathless hope of the world for moral order and social unity. But the only sure ground on which to base such an expectation is in the prophecy of divinely inspired men, and in the promise made by Christ respecting his kingdom; and the only power by which this hope can be realized is that which comes from the will of God to the hearts of men, as proclaimed in Jesus Christ and confirmed by the Holy Spirit in human experience. The pictures which glow on Isaiah's vivid pages are not rhetorical extravagances, such as naturally spring from a poetic imagination, but sincere attempts to portray in luxuriant imagery the splendors of a world under the rule of divine goodness. The same must be said for all the Old Testament prophets who foretold the coming of the Messiah.

In the form which the doctrine of the millennium has taken since the Apocalypse of John was written it has no place in the Old Testament. The ancient prophets predicted a final state of blessedness, which they sometimes described as introduced by Jehovah, and at other times as brought in by the advent of the Messiah.[1] This era was always at the

[1] Isaiah 40. 9–11; 52. 7–12; 9. 6; Zechariah 9. 9, 10.

outermost range of their vision, which occasionally seemed to rest in the immediate future, while now and again it stretched away an immeasurable distance, merging into eternity.

The Coming Kingdom

As was perfectly natural, what they forecast was bound up with the destiny of Israel, and at first their horizon was rimmed by the future history of their own people. But gradually they came to realize that the Jews were to become something grander than masters of the world; they were to be ministers of grace to the nations of the earth. This sublime conception was not shared by the people as a whole; it was possessed by only the most enlightened of their prophets. At the window of their outlook these inspired seers held the thought of Israel's triumph, but far beyond, in the haze of centuries yet to be, they caught glimpses of a conquest which should not be local, political, or national, but universal and spiritual, and the glory of which should belong not to man, but to God.

Judgment upon Israel when unfaithful to Jehovah, and upon all nations who refused obedience to him, would of necessity play a large part in the visions of the old prophets. The triumph of righteousness cannot be se-

cured without the overthrow of iniquity. Hence they spoke with profound earnestness to their own generations, and pronounced terrible woes upon all who forgot God. Their rebukes were of the utmost severity, and bore heavily upon the social and political sins of their day. They were practical men, and they handled plainly and without apology the common interests of the people and the solemn responsibilities of their leaders. They often clothed their messages in highly wrought apocalyptic speech. Since they were dealing with eternal principles many of their utterances may rightfully be carried over to any subsequent age. Their denunciations of wrong will be needed until the world has been cured of its iniquities. But to say their words are to be taken as literal predictions of what will happen at the end of the gospel dispensation is a misuse of the Scriptures.

Prophecies Yet to be Fulfilled

It is customary for some millenarians to make a list of the prophecies which were literally fulfilled at the birth of Christ, and another list of prophecies which they say will be literally fulfilled at the second advent of Christ. Two things are gratuitously assumed by them: first, that all prophecy must have

literal fulfillment, and, second, that what has not yet been fulfilled must be fulfilled at the particular time when Christ returns. Neither of these claims is true, and both are unnecessary. Who told these theorists that the prophecies concerning the kingdom of God could not in large part be fulfilled before the second coming of Christ? Or that the second advent of our Lord would not be at the climax of their fulfillment rather than in advance of it? The prophets did not say anything about it. Our Lord's words, as we have seen, suggest a prolonged course of progress for his kingdom before his return. The predictions will be fulfilled; nay, they are already in process of fulfillment, and have been for nearly two millenniums. In the fullness of time all that they signify will occur. There is no ground in Scripture for saying that Christ must come back to earth to make them happen.

This misuse of the Old Testament prophecies by pre-millennialists may be thus described: 1. They take every passage which refers to the approach of Jehovah to his people as meaning the second advent of Christ; whereas these prophecies, in so far as they are Messianic, if they do not foreshadow the first advent of Christ, pertain either to the care exercised over Israel by God, or to the final triumph

of righteousness.[2] 2. They appropriate the prophecies of Christ's ultimate victory for a period after his second advent; whereas they are just as applicable to a period before his return.

The demand of some millenarians for a literal fulfillment of prophecy is well illustrated in the use which is made of the following passage: "And his feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem on the east; and the mount of Olives shall be cleft in the midst thereof toward the east and toward the west, *and there shall be* a very great valley; and half of the mountain shall remove toward the north, and half of it toward the south."[3] The balance of the chapter, as well as the portion just cited, is said to describe precisely what will take place at Christ's second advent. Similar treatment is insisted upon with regard to many such apocalyptic passages, which the limits of these pages make impossible of quotation here. Particularly is this true of the book of Daniel, which is regarded by premillennialists as a treasury of specific predictions bearing on the

[2] The following are examples of passages thus used: Deuteronomy 33. 2; Psalms 2. 8, 9; 72. 11; 86. 9; Isaiah 9. 6, 7; 25, 9; 35; 49. 6, 7; Daniel 7. 18–22, 27; Ezekiel 21. 25–27; Zechariah 9. 10; 14. 16.

[3] Zechariah 14. 4.

second advent and the millennium which must be fulfilled in the exact form indicated. Persons who believe this to be the true way of interpreting such scripture will not be convinced they are wrong by any argument, and the attempt to set them right is futile.

Jesus made little use of such apocalyptic language as the ancient Hebrew prophets employed so abundantly. Both he and his apostles spoke of the destiny of the righteous more plentifully than of the fate of the wicked. They proclaimed a gospel of hope, not a counsel of despair. The victory of the saints had larger bulk in their teachings than the defeat of sinners. They trusted the welfare of the Kingdom to the working out of spiritual forces among men under the direction of the Lord of Hosts.

A Kingdom of Material Force

Against all this is the modern premillennialist. He has no expectation that Christ will win through the exercise of his spiritual authority and influence in the world. He believes that when our Lord returns to set up his regime of universal peace and righteousness he will bring it about by the use of forces akin to those employed by the temporal kings and potentates of this world. There is not a hint in his interpretation of the Scriptures

that redeeming love and divine truth are the instruments by which Christ is to subdue the world to himself.

Furthermore, the reign of our Lord is described in terms which are distinctively material and physical. The throne of Christ is pictured in just such phraseology as would be used to portray the regal splendor of any earthly emperor. Associated with this central seat of royalty there are other thrones to be held by the saints who will share his authority. Premillennialists are absolutely devoid of spiritual imagination. Their only conception of Christ's sovereignty is based on what they know of kings in the history of mankind. No one who has read premillennial literature can question the truthfulness of this statement. If premillennialists do in their inner thought project any spiritual ideas into their notion of Christ's future kingdom, they carefully avoid saying so in what they have written. One is left with the impression that they have a kind of lustful satisfaction in the thought that they are themselves to be rulers, conquerors, and glorious princes in the age to come.

Jesus said in the plainest terms: "The kingdom of God cometh not with observation."[4]

[4] Luke 17. 20.

He declared, "My kingdom is not of this world."[5] He affirmed, "The kingdom of God is within you."[6] But premillennialists say it is yet to come, and when it appears it will be a material kingdom. Because others, whom they call post-millennialists, believe that the kingdom of God is now expressing itself, though not completely, through the operations of Christianity, premillennialists say of them that they exalt the church above Christ, while premillennialists exalt Christ instead of the church. This is as false as to charge post-millennialists with being atheists. They believe that only through Christ, whose spiritual leadership they reverence, can the world ever be conquered for righteousness. In a certain sense the post-millennialist is no millennialist at all. He looks for no segregated period of blessedness a thousand years in length. He does expect a gradual triumph of truth till the final conquest of Christ, and he is perfectly convinced that when Christ does return the sublimest prophecies of the Old Testament will be gloriously fulfilled.[7]

Disappointed Zealots

The Hebrew prophecies of the advent of the

[5] John 18. 36.
[6] Luke 17. 21.
[7] See Isaiah 2. 2–5; 11. 1–9; 35; 55; 60.

Messiah were not literally fulfilled in the way the Jews expected, and hence most of them rejected Christ when he appeared. Premillennialists call attention to this fact and say that it was not the divine plan to have all these predictions fulfilled during the first period of Christ's earthly life, but that when he comes again he will fulfill them to the last item. His second advent with material power is in their view absolutely necessary for this very purpose. But as the Jews rejected Christ at his first coming, so they say many Christians are now denying that a literal fulfillment of these aspects of Messianic prophecy should be expected, and such persons would be inclined to repudiate Christ if he came in that way.

There is a saner view than this, but it falls heavily upon the premillennialists. As the Jews were mistaken in interpreting the prophecies in literal terms, so the premillennialists may be equally wrong now in interpreting these prophecies with relation to the second coming of our Lord. There is every reason to assume that this is the case, since Christ invariably insisted on the spirituality of his kingdom. He refused, after certain of his great miracles, to allow royal honors to be bestowed upon him. He took every means to impress his disciples that he was not intending to set up a temporal

kingdom. Even at the last day of his earthly ministry, just before his ascension, those disciples asked him when he was going to restore the kingdom unto Israel. They stupidly ignored all that he had said. They were so obsessed by the idea that he must establish a temporal kingdom that they could not put it out of their minds even in the sacred moment when he was bidding them farewell. Our Lord proceeded at once to tell them that they were on the wrong scent, and that they should have power enough when the Holy Spirit came upon them to indue them with energy to become witnesses for him in all parts of the earth.

Premillennialists are in much the same state. They cannot conceive it possible that Christ meant exactly what he said. They are sure, because they insist on a literal interpretation of the ancient prophecies, that our Lord must set up a physical throne and sway a material scepter over all nations of mankind. We know that our Lord predicted that he would come to judge the world, but we also know that he gave no promise of any such thing as the premillennialists claim. They are just as wrong to-day as the Jews were two thousand years ago; and if our Lord should return to the earth while they are living, they would be as far astray as were the Jews, in-

cluding our Lord's disciples, when he failed at his first coming to do that which they confidently expected him to do.

Without Sweetness and Light

It is no extravagance to say that there never was a more pronounced type of predestination than that involved in the theory of the elect gathered out of the world by the preaching of the gospel, including the complete restoration of Israel as a part of a program which arbitrarily picks a few persons from the whole population of the globe to constitute the bride of Christ. This is predestination in a new form, but it is of the old essence. There is a smack of fatalism in it. It provokes a smile to observe that all premillennialists take it for granted that they themselves are among the elect. They invariably speak of the time when "we" shall be caught up in the air to meet the Lord.

That believers constitute the body of Christ is a favorite thought with Paul, though he is the only New Testament writer who uses the metaphor. "We, who are many, are one body in Christ, and severally members one of another."[8] "For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of the

[8] Romans 12. 5. See also 1 Corinthians 10. 17.

body, being many, are one body; so also is Christ."[9] Paul says God has given Christ "to be head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all."[10] The figure used is the finest possible illustration of diversity in unity. It is a very beautiful conception. But premillennialists, with their fatal disposition to take the poetry out of every symbolical idea, misuse this figure by pressing it to unreasonable lengths. They think of the body of Christ as in process of making, and say that when it is complete our Lord will return to take it. The only thing which inspires them to do missionary or evangelistic work is the thought that every true convert made is an addition to the body of Christ. Their melancholy conviction that the world is growing worse and the church is becoming feebler does not drive them to despair, because the body of Christ is not the church, but the elect which are called out of the church, finally to be separated entirely from it. They buoy up their spirits by the thought that the exact number of saints to finish the body of Christ may be reached any hour, and instantly the Lord will return. Of course, there is no justification for

[9] 1 Corinthians 12. 12.

[10] Ephesians 1. 27. See also Ephesians 4. 12; 5. 23; Colossians 1. 18; 2. 19; 3. 15.

such a theory outside of their imagination. The body of Christ, the church, is not a mathematical quantity. It is an organism through which Christ has been expressing himself for centuries. The moment men begin to measure it they lose all power to understand it. Spiritual truths are spiritually discerned. The narrow exclusiveness of extreme premillennialism is one of its worst faults.

In such a system there is no room for tenderness. The sweet and gentle spirit of Christ does not pervade the thought of the premillennialist. He forgets that the only class of persons Christ condemned in terms of unsparing denunciation were scribes and Pharisees who thought themselves good enough, and hence not in need of the repentance which Jesus preached or of the salvation which he came to provide. Against these avowedly righteous people who looked with scorn upon their less pious fellow mortals Jesus hurled his most pointed shafts of criticism. It might be well if premillennialists could remember this, both to safeguard themselves against the danger of Pharisaism and also to prevent them from looking with too great complacency on the awful destruction which they picture, and for which they feel themselves obliged to offer some kind of apology, lest their Lord seem to

be a pitiless sovereign whose only purpose is to gain complete sovereignty over the earth at whatever cost. The Son of man views the lost world as an object of great solicitude and the wicked people of the earth as the victims of diabolical assault who ought to be rescued by every persuasive appeal which can be made from the terrible consequences of their alienation from God. This is apparently not the feeling of the premillennialist. He is convinced that the vast majority of mankind living and dead will be swept into perdition. It is enough for him to look upon that destruction as inevitable and to thank God for his own deliverance and the deliverance of the other elect from the frightful tragedy. When he is told that such a view of God does the everlasting Father an injustice, and is calculated to make men still more rebellious against the divine authority, and thus increase the wickedness of the world, his reply is that death has been sweeping off the planet an entire world population every thirty-three years. He says the world is in the hands of the devil, who has the power of death, and that Satan has slain the world more than fifty times in the present dispensation. The inference is that very few of the uncounted millions who sleep in their graves have had any opportunity to

be saved, the majority never having even heard of Christ. The argument is, if this is so, why perplex your soul about additional millions? This is such a dismal, dark, and unchristian view of the good and great God that it is more likely to make infidels of men than to induce them to turn from their sins to the Saviour of the world.

Jewish State and Hebrew Religion

Not only is premillennialism unspiritual and unchristian in the senses described in the foregoing pages, but it is also distinctively Jewish in all its characteristics. In the first place, there is no possibility of constructing such a millennium as is imagined without taking the traditional views held by the Hebrew people between the period when inspired prophecy closed and the period when Christ was born upon the earth. We have elsewhere sketched these views and need not here repeat them. But it is only by combining these with the famous passage in Revelation 20 that the premillennial theory could have been formulated.

It is perfectly natural that with such a view of the meaning of the Old Testament prophecies the premillennialists should look for the reestablishment of a distinctly Jewish king-

dom under the sovereignty of the Messianic Prince. We find that many of this cult are actually looking not only for the restoration of the Jews to Palestine, but the actual setting up again of the Hebrew state, accompanied with all the splendors and pomp of the days of Solomon, and, indeed, a greater glory than existed in the golden era of his reign. They are counting on Jerusalem as the capital of the world, to which all nations shall bow in subserviency. They even predict the restoration of the Jewish religion with the ceremonial observance of its ritual worship. This is to be glorified and transfigured in some spiritual way; nevertheless it is to be a perpetuation on a loftier plane of that old covenant which Jesus Christ himself said he had come to annul and which the early apostles struggled so valiantly to remove from the thought of their Jewish converts. It is difficult to understand how people, reading the Acts of the Apostles, in which the contention with Judaizers and Hebrew spoilers of the gospel was so sharp and continuous, can dream that the thing which was so bitterly opposed in the first century should at last, under divine authority, be restored at the time of Christ's coming again to the earth.

It follows from all this that Christianity is

not the final religion, as we have been taught to believe. Another is coming, a kind of glorified Judaism, to take its place. If the premillennialists looked forward to the time when the Christian religion, as we now understand it, should be developed into an even nobler expression of the life of God in the souls of men, one might stretch himself out toward it as a blessed speculation, even if one thought it a visionary and unlikely thing. Christ intimated that there was much truth yet to be developed and that the Spirit of the Lord would lead believers into that truth, and the apostles who immediately followed him spoke in much the same strain. We may expect that Christianity has not attained its ultimate form, and so far would not find ourselves in disagreement with those who conceive a better institution than the organized Christianity of our day. But this is quite different from a return to an obsolete form of religion. Such a reaction would be contrary to all the principles of development. History may repeat itself, but it never goes back. We always acknowledge our debt to Greece and Rome, to Assyria and Babylon, but we do not feel that we are making any advance if we return to forms of civilization or even expressions of religion which have their source and signifi-

cance in an ancient civilization. To assume that Divine Providence gave to us in the history of the Hebrew people the norm of ultimate national and religious life is not only without foundation in the Scriptures, but is also foreign to any rational conception of the meaning of history, and the slow but steady development of human institutions, to say nothing of the divine ideals which have been given to us by revelation.

Shall We Try to Save the World?

It is fatal to the whole scheme of the premillennialist that, having an unspiritual program, the advocates of this theory should not expect to have any profound influence in bettering the world. They do not regard it as their business to pervade society with wholesome and corrective influences. It is their function only to help gather out of the world the small body of the elect who shall be constituted the Bride of Christ. The only support they seem to have for such a theory is found in an incidental allusion to the prophecy of Amos in a speech made by James at the Council of Jerusalem, to which we have referred in detail elsewhere. It does not offset the depressing effect of this theory to say that many premillennialists are devout people, interested in the work of for-

eign missions and the evangelization of their own country. However industriously they may pursue this work, and however sincerely they may seek to add to the body of Christ the few who are to be saved out of the great mass, the diffusion of the doctrine that the world is not to be saved until after it has once more been destroyed is certain to discourage the whole great effort of Christendom to raise the world out of darkness into light.

An artist and his wife came back from Paris a few months after their marriage to look for a place in New York where they could start housekeeping. They were not satisfied with an apartment. They desired a home of their own. They found a building which had once been a stable and was at that time being used as a factory and storeroom. This they leased, removed its rubbish and built in partitions, stairways, windows, doors, fireplaces, and other improvements. They beautified the windows and doors with some stained glass remnants which had been left in the old building, and soon had one of the cosiest and most artistic homes in the whole city. It was their spirit which transformed the stable into a delightful dwelling place. So it is that the life of God in the soul of man will transfigure any environment. The Christian religion is doing that for

the world. Little by little it drives out ugliness and discord, and puts in beauty and harmony. The old Hebrew prophets looked for no setback in the program of general deliverance and development. They plainly expected that the movement of the centuries would proceed until the world was redeemed, even physical nature being transformed and human society reshaped until universal peace and righteousness should prevail. This hope they transmitted to subsequent generations. Christ came to certify the correctness of their expectations, to intensify the longing of humanity for the fulfillment of their prophecies, and to put into operation forces which in the fullness of time will bring to pass all that was predicted.

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